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UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

THE ISSUE OF CLASS IN ZADIE SMITH'S *NW*

Master's thesis

SIRLI MANITSKI

SUPERVISOR: *LECT.* ENE-REET SOOVIK

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the representation of class belonging in *NW*, a 2012 novel by the contemporary British author Zadie Smith. As class can still be seen as a relevant phenomenon impacting upon individual lives in British society, the thesis focuses on a recent work of British fiction in order to see how the notion can be explored by a literary work. By analysing the novel from a class-conscious perspective, the author hopes to add to the scholarly discussion of class in contemporary British fiction. In order to set a clear framework for the analysis, the prism of the theoretical concepts proposed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is used. The thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters and the conclusion.

The Introduction provides an overview of the general approaches to the concept of class, the importance of class in British society and its impact on literature more specifically.

Chapter 1 elaborates upon Bourdieu's concepts of *economic*, *social*, *cultural* and *symbolic capital*, *habitus*, *field* and *taste* as the major tools employed in Bourdieu's approach to social stratification, thus setting up a systematic framework for the following analysis.

Chapter 2 discusses Smith's novel from the vantage point of the theoretical framework, centring on the four main characters individually and thus attempting to detect the manifestations and relevance of class belonging in the social reality of the characters' lives.

The main findings are presented in the Conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

All societies can be characterised by the hierarchical ordering of social relationships regardless of how primitive or advanced those societies might be. The hierarchical order of human societies has traditionally been described as deriving from material inequalities between different groups of individuals, a notion supported already by Karl Marx (Marx & Engels 1948). Regardless of whether theoreticians support the notion of economic determinism, they do agree that inequalities are socially constructed and inherited across generations (e.g., Bourdieu 2010). Inequalities lead to social stratification, the division of individuals into classifiable social categories or classes. Arguably, there is no other Western society today where the notions of class and social mobility play as important a role as they do in Britain where distinct social hierarchies persist: Rosemary Crompton (2009: 3), for instance, has noted that "people still constantly compare themselves to others, and economic and social hierarchies are enduring". If we maintain that hierarchies are enduring, then there must be both reasons for and consequences of their endurance, which is exactly why they still deserve to be studied – analysing social inequalities will have value for as long as inequalities persist.

The concept of class itself has been a notoriously difficult one to pin down. According to Crompton (2009: 8), "it has become commonplace to argue that there is no single, 'correct' definition of the class concept, nor any universally 'correct' measure of it". Since we can find many different definitions of social class, we cannot say that there is a correct way of defining the term. My understanding of class for the purposes of this paper will rely mostly on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, which tries to explain the creation and persistence of social divisions through the concepts of *economic*, *cultural*, *social* and

symbolic capital, *habitus*, *field* and *taste*. Those concepts enable us to approach class as a marker of social divisions in a very systematic way, focusing on specific contexts in which social hierarchies become manifest, instead of trying to explain class as an abstract concept. In such abstract terms, Crompton (2009: 15) has noted that "the use of 'class' to indicate lifestyles, prestige or rank is probably the most commonly used sense of the term. Here 'class' is bound up with hierarchy, of being 'higher than' or 'lower than' some other person or group". Therefore, we use the term *class* as an abstract concept simply referring to persisting hierarchies or try to explain social differences between individuals through the prism of a systematic theory such as Bourdieu's.

Crompton (2009: 8) has argued that "all complex societies are characterized, to varying extents, by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic rewards". She (2009: 8) has also added that "the study of the causes and consequences of these inequalities is the major focus of class and stratification theorists and researchers". Divisions are mainly created to benefit one group over another, which is why class analysis focuses on inequalities. As Crompton (2009: 27) notes, "the term 'class' is widely used as a general label to describe structures of inequality in modern societies". She has also observed that "common to all sociological conceptions of class and stratification is the argument that social and economic inequalities are not 'natural' or divinely ordained, but rather, emerge as a consequence of human behaviours" (Crompton 2009: 8). Inequalities are, therefore, the result of one group in society trying to gain power over another group.

Crompton (2009: 11) defines inequality as "a reflection of differential access to the means of production". Such a definition resonates with Marx's understanding of social order as he believed that an individual's position in social hierarchy is determined by whether they own the means of production or sell their labour to the owners. The central tenet of Marxism is the belief that "the basis of any society is its economic organization,

which then gives rise to certain social relations" (Bertens 2014: 71). According to Marxist understandings of social relations, the society is divided "into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – bourgeoisie and proletariat" (Marx & Engels 1948: 41). Not only does Marx maintain that human societies are structured by economic systems, but he also believes that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels 1948: 41). Marx believes that the social order includes two antagonistic classes whose life opportunities depend on their relation to the means of production.

Even though later theories of social class have greatly relied on Marx's understandings, the internal coherence and homogeneity of classes that he assumed have come to be seen as an over-simplification. For instance, David Cannadine has argued:

> Most Marxists believed that a person's class identity was collective rather than individual, and was primarily determined by his (or, just occasionally, her) relationship to the means of production. But this is clearly too narrow, too materialistic, too reductionist an approach, and it erroneously assumed that all social identities were shared rather than single. (Cannadine 2000: 17)

As Western societies have developed further, Marx's understandings of class relations have come to be seen as too simplistic to properly describe contemporary societies. Nick Bentley (2008: 9) has, e.g., argued that "the categorization of such a complex beast as the nature of social division is fraught with problems". Any attempt to divide individuals into social categories on the basis of objective criteria is bound to simplify the situation. Gordon Marshall et al (2005: 5) have maintained that "the occupational structure has become progressively more complex as the numbers in traditional proletarian occupations are decreased and those in services increased". Consequently, the lines between economic and social relations have become too blurred for society to be described in traditional Marxist terms. Regardless of the declining importance of Marxism, class theory has "a common origin in Marx's and Weber's work" and "the ideas of both Marx (1818–83) and Weber (1864–1920) continue to shape debates in class theory in the early twenty-first

century" (Crompton 2009: 28). Therefore, Marxism provided later theorists with the foundation of class analysis. Bentley (2008: 8) has also suggested that "the division of society into the three broad economic classes of working, middle and upper relies heavily on social and economic theories developed by those on the Left, and in particular those influenced by Marxist theory". Marxism has, therefore, had a significant effect on theories of class analysis, which is why we cannot overlook Marx if we are to understand the development of the class concept. We should, however, bear in mind Cannadine's (2000: 21) assertion that "any model is an over-simplification of the complexity of society".

One of the consequences of social stratification is the lack of equality of opportunity. Cannadine (2000: 17) has argued that "the material circumstances of peoples' existence – physical, financial, environmental – do matter in influencing their life-chances, their sense of identity, and the historical part which they and their contemporaries may (or may not) play". Even though Cannadine disagrees with Marx on economic determinism, he does agree with the Marxist belief that opportunities depend greatly on one's socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, as noted by Cannadine (2000: 16), "even if, in its crudest forms, the Marxist approach to class no longer carries conviction, that is no reason for dismissing class altogether". Another important insight provided by Marxism is the belief that individuals cannot escape their social circumstances. As Hans Bertens notes:

> Marxism as an intellectual perspective still provides a useful counterbalance to our propensity to see ourselves and the writers whom we read as completely divorced from socio-economic circumstances. It also counterbalances the related tendency to view the books and poems we read as originating in an autonomous mental realm, as the free products of free and independent minds. (Bertens 2014: 69)

Marxism, therefore, helps us to understand the crucial role that social class can play in cultural production – since no mind is independent enough to create a social context untouched by reality, cultural works reflect the social organisation of society.

The notion that literary works are in one way or another influenced by social relations will also be one of the central arguments supported in this paper. Consequently, this paper

relies heavily on the Marxist assumption that "literature is in the first instance a social phenomenon, and as such, it cannot be studied independently of the social relations, the economic forms, and the political realities of the time in which it was written" (Rivkin & Ryan 2002: 234). It will be argued, therefore, that literary works reflect social realities. The idea supported here is that being born into a certain class affects one's opportunities in life as well as shapes their understanding of the world around them. As Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (2002: 238) note, "if you are born into the working class, society will address or "interpellate" you in ways that shape who you are and what you can expect in life. It will also dictate what and how you can think". An aspect of social organisation that has such a significant impact on one's life and understandings should not be ignored in our analysis of literature either.

Crompton (2009: 11) defines class as a "peculiarly modern phenomenon". By such a definition she means that the notion of class is mainly a characteristic of modern stratification systems – class is a concept characteristic of industrial societies. Marxist criticism was essentially a criticism of capitalist industrial societies and as such Marxism formed the basis of class theory. As noted by Crompton (2009: 16), "the modern concept of 'class' emerged as a central issue with the development of capitalist industrialism". Consequently, class helps us to understand why capitalist industrial societies function the way they do and how inequalities become manifest. However, the emergence of post-industrial societies shifted the focus. The rise of neo-liberalism at the end of the 1970s resulted in the decreasing importance of class analysis as many theorists started to dismiss social class as a useful concept in the analysis of British society. However, Crompton (2009: 23) has argued that "although 'work' as employment *may* possibly have declined as a significant source of social identity, work is still the most significant determinant of the

material well-being of the majority of the population. Thus descriptive class indices continue to demonstrate the persisting structure of inequality in contemporary societies".

Regardless of the fact that "the *idea* of 'class' has lost its importance as a central discourse, or political organizing principle, in contemporary societies" (Crompton 2009: 3), class divisions and social inequality still persist. Even though we have moved on from an industrial to a post-industrial society dominated mainly by the service sector, we still live in a capitalist society. "It still makes sense to describe late capitalist society as dominated by a 'ruling class' which is economically dominant, and has the capacity to influence crucially political and social life" (Scott cited in Crompton 2009: 24). Many of the observations Marx made about the ways in which a capitalist society functions still hold true. For instance, the idea that "the difference between prices and wages is where capitalism makes its money or generates wealth" (Rivkin & Ryan 2002: 236) is still very much true today if not even more so as social inequality has been increasing in Britain over the last few decades (see e.g., Ramesh 2011).

Talking about class in modern Britain can be a contentious issue. Since class has seemingly lost its importance as an analytical concept, many people would like to argue that class has lost its importance in society altogether. Bentley (2008: 10) has noted that "one recurring theme throughout the period from the 1950s onwards is the claim that Britain is becoming (or has become) a classless society". This notion became all-pervasive in British politics in the second half of the 20th century. Margaret Thatcher famously claimed in the 1980s that "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (Brittan 2013: para. 5). According to Bentley (2008: 4), "this off-the-cuff remark came to represent the focus on individualism at the heart of Thatcherism". The neo-liberalism promoted by Thatcherite politics put great emphasis on

the individual, which meant that class as a marker of collective identities became a marginalised concept in the analysis of British society.

The new culture of individualism was an effective way how to justify social inequality – if there is no such thing as society, then there are no such things as social classes, which means that there is no class oppression and the individual can solely be blamed for their social circumstances. Cannadine (2000: 2) has noted that "for Marx, class was the essence of history and of human behaviour, but for Thatcher, class has been the perversion of both". Therefore, conscious political efforts were made in the 1980s to downplay the role of social class and create an impression of Britain as a classless society. Bentley (2008: 10) has argued that "this tends to be a political move that in some way bolsters the justification of a political agenda, rather than being based on actual statistics about the wealth distribution of people in Britain". Also, Thatcher claimed that there are only individual men and women and there are families, but Crompton (2009: 7) has argued that "the family plays a major role in the reproduction of class inequalities". The role of the family unit in the continuing existence of inequality should not be underestimated since "disadvantage is perpetuated from parent to child" (Rawnsley 2013: para. 5). The importance of primary socialisation in the family, a notion strongly supported by Bourdieu, will also be heavily relied on in the course of the present thesis.

Crompton (2009: 5) has firmly stated that "although it is pointless to attempt to deny, or ignore, this individualistic societal shift, this does not mean, as some have argued, that 'class is dead'. 'Class' still persists as systematically structured social and economic disadvantage, which is reproduced over the generations". Cannadine (2000: 2) expressed the same idea when he argued that "class is still essential to a proper understanding of British history and of Britain today", and, as Andrew Rawnsley (2013: para. 6) notes,

"social mobility is not just frozen, it is going into reverse". Class is a factor still strongly felt by the large majority of the population.

Tony Bennett et al (2010: 2) have also noted that "increasingly polarised inequalities that have been a feature of British society since the 1990s are broadly shared by Western economies. Yet the language of class has rarely been so muted, particularly in Britain". Britain has become a society in denial of the relevance of class – on the surface level class has been denied as a relevant category, but underneath the surface people still feel the divisions creating class boundaries. Bentley (2008: 10) has argued that differences in wealth between the richest and poorest elements continue to have a significant effect on the way British society is organised, and the way people are represented in cultural terms. This is exactly why class should not be ignored as a relevant source of explanations of cultural production. As Cannadine (2000: 23) maintains, "to write class out of British history and British life is to disregard or misunderstand one of its central themes".

Since class still forms one of the central themes of British society, we can argue that we should not disregard class when analysing British literature either. Literary texts are not a clear reflection of social reality; however, literary authors cannot escape their own social positioning, which is why their own class can influence their works in terms of how and what exactly they render on the page. As Philip Tew (2007: 7) has noted, "novels both rationalize and engage dialectically with our historical presence, playing their part, however provisionally at times, in our understanding of and reflection upon our lives". The novel is not a self-contained entity that can be completely cut off from the outside world – novels are in one way or another in dialogue with the larger reality. Tew (2007: 89) has also argued that "the concerns of a writer do not emerge from a vacuum, but possess historical, literary, critical and sociological contexts and precursors". We could also

paraphrase this in the words of Lawrence Driscoll (2009: ix) and say that "no book is an island". This notion is further supported by Bourdieu:

> Differences between works are predisposed to express differences between authors, partly because, in both style and content, they bear the mark of their authors' socially constituted dispositions (that is, their social origins, retranslated as a function of the positions in the field of production which these dispositions played a large part in determining) (Bourdieu's 2010: 11).

Ideas and texts do not exist in isolation – authors and texts are in constant dialogue with both their own reality and other texts respectively. Since authors are both historically and socially situated, then their own experiences as members of society influence the way they depict social relations in their works. Essentially that entails depicting social realities that the authors are most familiar with.

The main issue with British literature has been the dominance of middle-class narratives among canonised authors. According to Bentley (2008: 10), "the field is still dominated by what could be broadly called middle-class writers". Driscoll (2009: 4) has also noted that "although it is true that there are exceptions to be found among the class backgrounds of the canonical authors of the British novel (e.g., working-class authors such as Caryl Phillips or Dennis Potter who both graduated from Oxford), generally the large bulk of "famous" authors today come down to us from a rather narrow educational/class segment of British society". The predominance of middle-class authors means that the perspective of a single class segment has become dominant in British literary works. As suggested by Driscoll (2009: 4), "when we read the canonized contemporary British novel we are dealing with a literary form produced not by "Britain" but by a small middle-class section of society and one which is encouraged by various media to see itself as the spokesperson for all classes". Such a narrowing of social perspectives inevitably brings about the marginalisation of working-class characters whose voices rarely become heard.

In addition, middle-class literature often fails to distance itself from its own prejudices leading to class bias in literature. This can be seen as one of the reasons why

class is important in our analysis of literature as analysing class can reveal social prejudices either explicit or implicit in literary works. Tew (2007: 88) has noted that "few of these novelists allow the majority 'other' of society into their social narrative". Dominic Head (2006: 240) has also referred to "the gradual disappearance of specifically working-class concerns" in contemporary British literature. Middle-class literature would not be a cause of concern if the large majority of canonised authors today would not be of middle-class background themselves and would not write predominantly from a middle-class perspective. However, "those present and mostly assumed as being normative are middle-class presences, and those most often either elided or marginalized are the working class ones" (Tew 2007: 89). Consequently, the novel "inevitably becomes a hegemonic tool, a reactionary cultural force that serves, broadly, to reinforce the status quo" (Head 2006: 243). Therefore, the middle-class perspective has become a tacit norm through which literature is being defined.

The issue of class has been downplayed in public discourse as well as in literature in recent decades. Driscoll (2009: 3) has explored some of the reasons for the decreasing relevance of class suggesting that "from Thatcher to Blair a transformation has occurred in which an ideological shift has attempted to erase the category of class from public discourse, while in the academy, postmodern theories have bolstered this erasure through its focus on margins and the micropolitics of desire". Driscoll (2009: 6) also suggests that the postmodern focus on the plurality of identities has helped to decrease the relevance of class in literary works as well as in literary criticism. However, referring to John Westergaard, Driscoll (2009: 8) maintains that "perceptions of classlessness are purely ideological".

The paradox behind the notion of classlessness is that class has been declared dead both in public discourse and in literary criticism at a time when economic inequalities have

become sharper as "Britain has become more divided by class and inequality, not less" (Driscoll 2009: 8). Therefore, class has been largely ignored as a relevant topic in public discourse, literary criticism and literature in recent decades despite the fact that divisions between social classes have been increasing. Since we mainly get a middle-class perspective when reading contemporary British fiction, then realities such as the fact that "17 per cent of the British population still lives below the poverty line" (Tew 2007: 50) will largely escape us – the class bias built into the literary field will largely exclude people from those sections of society. As noted by Tew (2007: 50), "these realities are the 'underbelly' of much of the fiction of the period, one which authors either scarcely scratched or in embarrassment concealed to save their blushes".

By analysing Zadie Smith's 2012 novel *NW* from a class-conscious perspective, the present author hopes to add to the scholarly discussion of class in contemporary British fiction. In order to set a clear framework for the analysis, the following chapter will be elaborating upon the core concepts of Pierre Bourdieu's social theory. These concepts in turn will help to elucidate the ways in which class boundaries come about in social space. The aforementioned notion that contemporary literature is dominated by middle-class perspectives will also be supported by Bourdieu's theory as he claims that cultural production in general is dominated by the ideas of the ruling class. The main aim of the thesis is to see how class is depicted in this work of contemporary fiction, specifically asking if the novel has a middle-class focus. The author will be looking at the markers used by Smith to indicate class belonging to see whether class emerges as relevant in the novel and to map its manifestations in the text. The analysis will depart from the concepts developed by Bourdieu. This will also let us see to what extent Bourdieu's theory is applicable to literary analysis and what kind of results such an analysis can yield.

CHAPTER 1

Bourdieu's approach to social class

Bourdieu has been considered as one of the foremost social philosophers of the previous century (e.g., Grenfell 2014: 1). With a career that spanned for more than five decades, his extensive work covered various fields such as anthropology, philosophy, education, culture, economics, politics and history, to name just a few. Over the years, his work has been referred to in a wide range of academic disciplines and as noted by Michael Grenfell (2014: 2), "this applicability and adaptability is in many ways a measure of the worth of Bourdieu's approach to the social sciences". Grenfell (2014: 2) also adds that Bourdieu's notable contribution to social science research is characterised mainly by, on the one hand, the emphasis he puts on the link between theory and practice, and on the other, the unique set of conceptual terms he employs in the course of his analysis. Those conceptual terms will also be the main "thinking tools" relied upon in the course of the current paper.

The theoretical framework behind the present thesis will mainly be relying on Bourdieu's 1979 book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, first published in English in 1984, which focuses on the analysis of French society on the basis of Bourdieu's empirical research. As noted by Derek Robbins (2000: xi), "the book is a sociological analysis of 'taste'". *Distinction* is mainly concerned with the ways in which people's judgements of taste are related to their social position – taste can both determine an individual's position in social space and also be an act of social positioning in itself. In this respect, taste can function as a powerful form of cultural hegemony. Since Bourdieu's analyses are based on a survey by questionnaire carried out in France in the 1960s, he

combines theoretical concepts with empirical data. According to Bourdieu (2010: 5), "the survey sought to determine how the cultivated disposition and cultural competence that are revealed in the nature of the cultural goods consumed, and in the way they are consumed, vary according to the category of agents and the area to which they applied". After carrying out his analyses, Bourdieu was able to establish two basic facts:

> On the one hand, the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and, secondarily, to social origin (measured by father's occupation); and, on the other hand, the fact that, at equivalent levels of educational capital, the weight of social origin in the practice- and preference-explaining system increases as one moves away from the most legitimate areas of culture (Bourdieu 2010: 5).

Consequently, Bourdieu was able to establish that cultural practices depend mainly on educational qualifications and social origin.

In his analysis, Bourdieu focuses on the concepts of *habitus*, *field*, *capital* and *taste* to explain individual practices undertaken in the social world. However, "there are very few places in his work where he discusses the concept of class directly" (Crossley 2014: 85). Instead of focusing on technical issues, his emphasis lies on culture and lifestyle in explaining social hierarchies. Nick Crossley (2014: 85) notes, Bourdieu "does not offer a typology of classes to compete with others on the academic market". Instead, his theory of social class remains implicit. "His is a definition of class which incorporates within itself a recognition that class is an essentially contested concept" (Crossley 2014: 96). The labels that we use to mark social classes derive their value from our willingness to use them. Class is, therefore, a constructed concept the value of which can be contested. However, in order to make sense of the social space, we need to somehow categorise the demarcation lines dividing individuals and this is where Bourdieu's concepts will become helpful.

One of the reasons why Bourdieu's concepts are useful for analysing class relations is because his theoretical framework facilitates the analysis of the social forces shaping an individual's life trajectory. Grenfell (2014: 2) stresses that instead of being independent

entities, Bourdieu's conceptual terms are interconnected concepts, enabling us to analyse social phenomena systematically. Instead of reducing one's social position to a single determining factor, he puts emphasis on the relational nature of social structures:

> Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin—proportion of blacks and whites, for example, or natives and immigrants—income, educational level etc.), nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices (Bourdieu 2010: 100).

In order to avoid oversimplification of the social space, the whole network of relationships should be considered. Bourdieu (2010: 373) has also noted that "social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is 'normally' (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position". By introducing the concepts of *cultural*, *social* and *symbolic capital* in addition to *economic capital*, Bourdieu distances himself from a materialist understanding of inequality and "in doing this, he is distinguishing himself from Marxism" (Crossley 2014: 86). Bourdieu, therefore, maintains that power and dominance in social space depend not only on economic resources but also on cultural and social resources. Crossley (2014: 86) also points out that "the value of any form of capital depends, in part, upon social recognition". Therefore, we can say that capital derives its importance from the value that individuals place on it. What Bourdieu finds important is the connection between all of the pertinent properties and the value individuals are willing to place on them – a property can have value only if we are willing to recognise it as valuable.

Bourdieu (2010: 256) asserts that "we can speak of a class fraction although it is nowhere possible to draw a demarcation line such that we can find no one on either side who possesses all the properties most frequent on one side and none of the properties most frequent on the other". In his words, these groups are "separated by systems of differences"

(Bourdieu 2010: 256). Therefore, we can divide a society into relatively homogeneous sets on the basis of the properties that the individuals share – the types of capital that the individuals possess, their habitus, their taste – but the lines dividing individuals are never very explicit. Since everything in the social world is in a constant flux and the nature of social space is relational, we cannot draw permanent lines between social groups. However, Bourdieu firmly believes in the connection between the notions of habitus and field. As noted by Crossley (2014: 85), "location in social space shapes an individual's experiences, life chances and habitus". Dispositions, consequently, derive from one's position in social space. As a result, the positions individuals occupy in social space shape their lifestyles and habitus. This is why Bourdieu believes that everything that happens in social space is inevitably interrelated and an individual's position in society cannot be determined solely by one factor such as economic capital: the amount of cultural capital someone has depends both on their social origin and educational qualifications; an individual's ability to succeed in the educational system in turn depends on the cultural capital inculcated in them at an early age (social origin); the formation of habitus in turn depends on social origin, location in social space and cultural capital and so on. Everything in social space is, consequently, interrelated, which is why these concepts cannot exist in isolation. Instead, they all exert their influence on the formation of individual social positions and divisions between class fractions. The following sections of this chapter will outline the concepts of capital, habitus, field and taste to elaborate upon Bourdieu's understanding of how these interdependent concepts help to create class boundaries.

Forms of capital

While the term *capital* is usually associated with a strictly economic sense, Bourdieu gives the term a wider meaning. In his understanding, there are four different types of capital as

the concept can include *economic*, *cultural*, *social* and *symbolic capital*. Patricia Thomson (2014: 67) broadly defines the four forms of capital as follows:

> Economic (money and assets); cultural (e.g. forms of knowledge; taste, aesthetic and cultural preferences; language, narrative and voice); social (e.g. affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage) and symbolic (things which stand for all of the other forms of capital and can be "exchanged" in other fields, e.g. credentials).

All of these concepts are essentially assets individuals can bargain with to improve their position in social space. As noted by Rob Moore (2014: 99), "Bourdieu's purpose is to extend the sense of the term "capital" by employing it in a wider system of exchanges whereby assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields". By widening the meaning of the concept of capital, Bourdieu shuns the strictly materialist basis of class analysis, claiming that class is about so much more than economic means. He thus explains:

> The different forms of capital, the possession of which defines class membership and the distribution of which determines position in the power relations constituting the field of power and also determines the strategies available for use in these struggles—'birth', 'fortune' and 'talent' in a past age, now economic capital and educational capital—are simultaneously instruments of power and stakes in the struggle for power; they are unequally powerful in real terms and unequally recognized as legitimate principles of authority or signs of distinction, at different moments and, of course, by the different fractions (Bourdieu 2010: 315).

The different forms of capital are instruments of power, as individual members of society can bargain with them (unconsciously or not) to improve their social standing, and stakes in the struggle for power as the members are constantly trying to increase the amount of capital they have in order to gain more power.

Crossley (2014: 87) has noted that "every individual, on Bourdieu's account, has a portfolio of capital. They have a particular amount or volume of capital, and their capital has a particular composition". An individual's position in society depends on the volume and composition of their capital. The capital we are richest in determines what we derive our social power from. For instance, if we are richest in economic capital, then that is also where our power base is. By determining the volume and composition of an individual's

capital, we can then divide them into classes. However, as Crossley (2014: 90) argues, "individuals who are proximate in social space do not necessarily identify with one another or act collectively, which is what "real classes" involve for Bourdieu". In order to be identified as a class, a group of individuals has to act collectively. Even though they do not form a class, individuals who are close in social space share the same conditions of existence. According to Crossley (2014: 91), such individuals "are inclined to develop similar lifestyles, outlooks, dispositions and a tacit sense of their place in the world or "class unconsciousness"; that is, class habitus". Individuals who are located close in social space tend to develop similar dispositions and habits because their options are largely determined by their means – people who have a similar capital portfolio are more likely to meet and interact. Therefore, there is a clear link between positions and dispositions. According to Crossley (2014: 93), "linking habits or tastes to positions in social space is one of the main ideas that Bourdieu is known for". The habits and tastes individuals are likely to develop in turn depend on their capital portfolio as it largely determines the circles they are likely to move in and the fields they are likely to be involved with.

Economic capital

Bourdieu (2010: 222) believes that we cannot rely solely on economic theories, because they reduce an individual to their purchasing power without taking into account all the other variables that can influence their social position. However, this does not mean that he completely denies the importance of economic capital. Even though Bourdieu maintains that economic capital does not solely determine one's social standing, economic means have a significant effect on one's life chances as they determine the options available to them. As suggested by Bourdieu (2010: 48), "economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm's length". Those individuals who are exempt

from economic concerns are free to engage in activities characterised by the primacy of form over function, which those trapped by necessity cannot afford to spend their time on:

> As the objective distance from necessity grows, life-style increasingly becomes the product of what Weber calls a 'stylization of life', a systematic commitment which orients and organizes the most diverse practices—the choice of a vintage or a cheese or the decoration of a holiday home in the country. This affirmation of power over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies. (Bourdieu 2010: 48)

Thus, economic necessity largely determines the lifestyles of individuals who lack economic capital whereas those with a high level of economic capital are free to shape their own lifestyles. An individual's economic position in society is likely to blind them to the material conditions of existence experienced by other members of society. As Bourdieu (2010: 376) notes, "no one ever really puts himself 'in the place' of those on the other side of the social world. One man's extravagance is another man's prime necessity". The definition of necessity depends on one's conditions, and distance from economic necessity grants distance from material constraints and urgencies. The main value of economic capital, therefore, lies in the freedom of choice that it grants as it removes the limitations set by economic necessity.

As the economic means and conditions of existence an individual grows up with have a lasting effect on their habitus, they become accustomed to a certain style of life. As a consequence, the economic means available to them become an integral part of the way they relate to the world around them and also the way they present themselves to that world. For this reason, Bourdieu (2010: 375) claims that "having a million does not in itself make one able to live like a millionaire; and parvenus generally take a long time to learn that what they see as culpable prodigality is, in their new condition, expenditure of basic necessity". In his understanding, necessity depends on point of view – what is necessary for the wealthy can be seen as prodigality by the poor. Bourdieu (2010: 581) also

suggests that "the art of spending without counting" is what distinguishes the bourgeois from the petit bourgeois, and "'knowing how to be served' is one component of the bourgeois art of living" (Bourdieu 2010: 375). Consequently, individuals become accustomed to the lifestyle made possible for them by their economic capital over time, which is why their habits are difficult to change – just because someone is handed a million pounds does not mean that they will automatically behave like someone who has had access to a million pounds their entire life. This is where Bourdieu's belief in the interdependence of his theoretical concepts comes in – economic capital functions in conjunction with the other forms of capital, habitus, field and taste in determining an individual's social standing.

An important aspect to mention with regard to economic capital is its use in the reproduction of social positions. Bourdieu maintains that those individuals who have achieved a certain social standing with the help of economic capital will inevitably try to maintain and reproduce that position for their children. According to Bourdieu (2010: 331), "it is well known that fertility is high among low-income groups, falls to its lowest point in the middle-income groups, and rises again among high-income groups". This phenomenon exists because of the relative cost of child-rearing which is highest for the middle classes as they are socially the most ambitious groups. Unlike the working classes who limit their educational investments as their chances of entering the dominant class are low, the middle classes invest heavily in their children's education with the hopes of improving their social position. Bourdieu (2010: 331) describes the fertility strategies of the middle class as "those of people who can only achieve their initial accumulation of economic and cultural capital by restricting their consumption, so as to concentrate all their resources on a small number of descendants, whose role is to continue the group's upward trajectory". The dominant class is exempt from such concerns as they only have to maintain their social

position. This helps to explain the initial discrepancy between economic means and child-rearing. Since the individuals occupying positions in the middle strata of society form the most ambitious groups, they limit their expenses and focus their energies on their children's education as a strategy to improve their children's social position. As such, they are bargaining with their economic capital. Possession of economic capital, however, does not mean that an individual is also rich in the other forms of capital and *vice versa* as the different forms of capital are not reducible to each other.

Social capital

Another important form of capital for Bourdieu is social capital, which can be defined as "a capital of social connections" (Bourdieu 2010: 116). People can either inherit social capital, such as a "name, family connections etc." (Bourdieu 2010: 439), or they can accumulate it over time through social networks, including friends and colleagues, for instance. Social capital helps to reveal one of the shortcomings of Marxist understandings of class formation – social networks, the people we know, can have a significant impact on our chances in life. All the money in the world cannot buy access to certain prestigious social clubs the membership of which can to a great extent determine the options available to individuals. Bourdieu foregrounds the importance of social capital by claiming:

> Educationally equivalent individuals (e.g., the students of the *grandes écoles*) may differ radically as regards bodily hexis, pronunciation, dress or familiarity with legitimate culture, not to mention the whole set of specific competences and capacities which function as admission tickets to the bourgeois world, such as dancing, the rare sports, or parlour games (especially bridge). These skills, through the encounters they provide and the social capital they help to accumulate, no doubt explain subsequent differences in career. (Bourdieu 2010: 84)

The cultural competences and social activities an individual engages in can help them to meet the people who will help them on in life – hence, the importance of social networks as they can open doors that would otherwise remain shut.

The importance of social networks also highlights the importance of social origin. Since skills and competences are learned already at an early age, then social origin, family background, has a considerable influence on one's life. Bourdieu (2010: 278) argues that membership of an ancient group is "the sole guarantee of possession of all the properties which are endowed with the highest distinctive value because they can only be accumulated over time". As a result, being a member of a group of cultivated people gives one an advantage in life as certain competences become instilled in them already at an early age and family connections will also automatically introduce them to other like-minded people. As suggested by Bourdieu:

> The fact remains that one cannot truly understand the sometimes immense differences between categories which are nonetheless close in social space, such as craftsmen and small farmers, or foremen and technicians, unless one takes into account not only capital volume and composition but also the historical evolution of these properties, i.e., the trajectory of the group as a whole and of the individual in question and his lineage, which is the basis of the subjective image of the position objectively occupied (Bourdieu 2010: 456).

Therefore, an individual's position in social space is determined not only by their overall capital volume and composition, but also by their social trajectory and social origin. Bourdieu (2010: 460) also adds that individual and collective trajectory directs the perception of the social world.

Cultural capital

Cultural capital mainly refers to forms of cultural knowledge and competences. Cultural capital is accumulated through a long process of acquisition and inculcation first in the family and later at school, continuing throughout an individual's life. Crossley (2014: 93) notes that children from culturally wealthy backgrounds inherit their wealth in the form of embodied dispositions. Children from these culturally wealthy backgrounds can use their embodied cultural capital to succeed in the educational system and, consequently, also

make the most of the job market in the future. Primary socialisation in the family will, therefore, help them to succeed both at school and in life. Crossley (2014: 93) notes that there is a difference between embodied cultural capital (the values inculcated in us) and institutionalised cultural capital (educational qualifications). Individuals use both types of cultural capital to improve their position in social space. By this process, parents can ensure the reproduction of their social position for their children. This kind of "closure of ranks" (Crossley 2014: 93) is one of the reasons why it is difficult for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed in breaking the social pattern established by their parents and achieving social mobility. Once people have achieved a certain social position, they will want to reproduce it for their children as well, and the amount of cultural capital they have procured will make this process much easier for them.

The amount of cultural capital an individual is likely to have, therefore, depends on two main factors – education and social origin. According to Bourdieu (2010: xxiv), "cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education: surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin". Bourdieu distinguishes between two modes of acquisition of culture:

> Total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life and extended by a scholastic learning which presupposes and completes it, differs from belated, methodical learning not so much in the depth and durability of its effects—as the ideology of cultural 'veneer' would have it—as in the modality of the relationship to language and culture which it simultaneously tends to inculcate. It confers the self-certainty which accompanies the certainty of possessing cultural legitimacy, and the ease which is the touchstone of excellence; it produces the paradoxical relationship to culture made up of self-confidence amid (relative) ignorance and of casualness amid familiarity, which bourgeois families hand down to their offspring as if it were an heirloom. (Bourdieu 2010: 59)

One of the greatest advantages growing up in a culturally wealthy family can give is the ease with which bourgeois children approach legitimate works of art. The ability to enjoy ballet and opera, for instance, is a skill children from culturally disadvantaged backgrounds

might never learn due to the lack of early learning. According to Crossley (2014: 93), "there is another important aspect to "reproduction"; namely that the education system confers legitimacy, prestige and value (symbolic capital) upon the culture of the middle class, constituting it as cultural capital". Children who will not have come into contact with legitimate works of art at home and also miss out on them due to low educational qualifications will, therefore, be doubly disadvantaged. Bourdieu (2010: 67) also suggests that "bourgeois culture and the bourgeois relation to culture owe their inimitable character to the fact that /.../ they are acquired, preverbally, by early immersion in a world of cultivated people, practices and objects". This early immersion is the main reason why middle-class children enter the educational system with a higher level of cultural capital compared to working-class children. Bourdieu (2010: 331) also adds that self-made men "cannot have the familiar relation to culture which authorizes the liberties and audacities of those who are linked to it by birth, that is, by nature and essence".

Cultural competence confers distinction, which is why cultural capital can function as an instrument of domination. As noted by Bourdieu (2010: 225), "the appropriation of cultural products presupposes dispositions and competences which are not distributed universally (although they have the appearance of innateness)". Bourdieu foregrounds the importance of social origin in the formation of cultural competences by claiming:

> While variations in educational capital are always very closely related to variations in competence, even in areas, like cinema or jazz, which are neither taught nor directly assessed by the educational system, the fact remains that, at equivalent levels of educational capital, differences in social origin (whose 'effects' are already expressed in differences in educational capital) are associated with important differences in competence (Bourdieu 2010: 55).

Consequently, social origin influences both the educational capital attainable and the resulting cultural competence. On the attainability of educational qualifications, Bourdieu (2010: 422) also notes that "the choice of a discipline expresses the ambitions available to individuals of a given social origin with a given level of academic success". Certain

educational qualifications might be ruled out for children from disadvantaged backgrounds not only because of the lack of cultural and economic capital, but also because of the lack of expectations set on then by the family. Bourdieu here draws our attention to the fact that growing up in an environment where success is the norm also enables one to achieve more. This kind of presumption of success is one of the driving forces behind the reproduction of social positions for the middle class. Bourdieu further adds:

> The ideology of charisma, which imputes to the person, to his natural gifts or his merits, entire responsibility for his social destiny, exerts its effects far beyond the educational system; every hierarchical relationship draws part of the legitimacy that the dominated themselves grant it from a confused perception that it is based on the opposition between 'education' and ignorance (Bourdieu 2010: 389).

People are often unaware of how much their social background really affects their chances in life. If an individual comes from a working-class background, then it is *a fortiori* more difficult for them to reach positions of power in society.

In addition to the decisive role of social origin in the acquisition of embodied cultural capital, Bourdieu also emphasises the role of institutionalised cultural capital, i.e., educational qualifications. Thomson (2014: 73) argues that Bourdieu "was concerned to show the socially (re)productive effects of formal education". Bourdieu's emphasis lies on examining the ways in which education can function as a mechanism of social division. He shows that those children who already have a social and economic advantage due to their social origin can gain more from the educational system. Thomson (2014: 74) notes that for Bourdieu, education is one of the strategies families use to maintain and advance their social position. Bourdieu (2010: 14) claims that "academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)". For Bourdieu, education is a type of capital in itself as educational qualifications give access to social positions that will otherwise remain

unattainable. Furthermore, "educational qualifications function as a condition of entry to the universe of legitimate culture" (Bourdieu 2010: 20). The more qualified an individual is, the more culturally competent they are likely to be as well. In light of this, Bourdieu (2010: 131) has also noted that the fractions richest in cultural capital are often measured by their educational qualifications.

In addition to the lack of cultural capital, either embodied or institutionalised, an individual's entry into a certain class fraction can also be hindered by hidden criteria. Bourdieu (2010: 96) notes, "a number of official criteria in fact serve as a mask for hidden criteria: for example, the requiring of a given diploma can be a way of demanding a particular social origin" as only certain class fractions might have access to particular educational institutions or it might be a lot easier for them to gain access to them. What is more, Bourdieu claims that in analysing a social class, we should take:

> Into account not only the nature of the job and the income, but those secondary characteristics which are often the basis of their social value (prestige or discredit) and which, though absent from the official job description, function as tacit requirements, such as age, sex, social or ethnic origin, overtly or implicitly guiding co-option choices, from entry into the profession and right through a career, so that members of the corps who lack these traits are excluded or marginalized (Bourdieu 2010: 96).

Therefore, educational qualifications do not automatically guarantee entry into those social positions they should in principle give access to as the co-option choices referred to by Bourdieu might tacitly exclude them. Bourdieu (2010: 129) rightly observes that "academic qualifications never achieve total, exclusive acceptance. Outside the specifically scholastic market, a diploma is worth what its holder is worth, economically and socially; the rate of return on educational capital is a function of the economic and social capital that can be devoted to exploiting it". Here Bourdieu once again emphasises the interdependence between the different types of capital – cultural capital can confer power and status, but economic and social capital can set limits on its acquisition.

Symbolic capital

Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic capital to refer to the social recognition accumulated by individuals. For Bourdieu (1999: 7), "*symbolic capital* refers to degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)". Therefore, symbolic capital can be summed up as the symbolic rewards that individuals reap from their position in society – prestige, respectability and honour. The important thing to remember, however, is that the honour and prestige indicated by symbolic capital is the result of the conversion of other forms of capital. Bourdieu (1999: 7) also developed "as an integral part of his theory of practice, the concept of *symbolic power* based on diverse forms of capital which are not reducible to economic capital". Symbolic power refers to authority that is derived from consecration and prestige. In Bourdieu's words:

> The struggles to win everything which, in the social world, is of the order of belief, credit and discredit, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition—name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as a recognized power—always concern the 'distinguished' possessors and the 'pretentious' challengers (Bourdieu 2010: 249).

Symbolic power grants those who hold it the power to reproduce cultural consecration, to decide upon the legitimacy of cultural products. Symbolic capital, therefore, signifies the power that is gained from individual social positions.

Symbolic power can in turn lead to symbolic violence when that power is used by one individual against another in social space. Daniel Schubert (2014: 179) notes that "according to Bourdieu, contemporary social hierarchies and social inequality, as well as the suffering that they cause, are produced and maintained less by physical force than by forms of symbolic domination", and symbolic violence is the end result of that domination. Schubert (2014: 180) also adds that symbolic violence is "a generally unperceived form of violence and, in contrast to systems in which force is needed to maintain social hierarchy,

is an effective and efficient form of domination in that members of the dominant classes need exert little energy to maintain their dominance". Symbolic violence is inflicted, for instance, on working-class children in the educational system, because of the language and behaviour expected of them since those scholastic norms are "modelled on upper and middle class communication and behaviour" (Schubert 2014: 184), which is essentially alien to working-class children. Thus, the embodied cultural capital that middle-class children take with them from home gives them an advantage over working-class children to succeed in school, ending up in unperceived forms of symbolic violence being inflicted on working-class children.

Bourdieu (2010: 250) considers the middle classes to be in general more concerned with symbolic forms of power, claiming, "as is shown by the inversion of the relationship between spending on food and on clothing, and more generally, on substance and on appearance, as one moves from the working class to the petite bourgeoisie, the middle classes are *committed* to the symbolic". One could suggest that the middle classes are more concerned with appearances, trying to seem more than they are in order to better themselves, essentially introducing the dichotomy between being vs. seeming. According to Bourdieu (2010: 251), "the petit bourgeois is haunted by the appearance he offers to others and the judgement they make of it". Bourdieu (2010: 251) also maintains that "he is bound to be seen—both by the working classes, who do not have this concern with their being-for-others, and by the privileged classes, who, being sure of what they are, do not care what they seem—as the man of appearances, haunted by the look of others and endlessly occupied with being seen in a good light". The middle classes, being in a better position to reach the dominant class compared to the working classes, use symbolic forms of power as a strategy to improve their social standing, often trying to seem more than what they are in the process of doing that.

Habitus

Together with the different types of capital and field, habitus forms a central concept of Bourdieu's theory of practice. Concepts similar to that of Bourdieu's habitus have been developed by a variety of authors. Karl Maton (2014: 55) points out that the related notion of "habit" has appeared in the works of William James (1976), Harold Garfinkel (1967), Alfred Schutz (1972) and Peter Ludwig Berger & Thomas Luckmann (1971), adding that "among thinkers who pre-date Bourdieu in describing something akin to "habitus" are Aristotle, Ockham, Aquinas, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Elias, as well as Durkheim and Weber". However, Maton (2014: 55) claims that Bourdieu aimed to break with past accounts of the term and "said habitus so as *not* to say habit". According to Maton (2014: 55), "the key difference is that Bourdieu's *habitus* emphasizes the underlying structures of practices; that is, acts are underpinned by a *generative principle*".

The term habitus refers to dispositions acquired through lived experience, therefore being inseparable from personal history. Maton (2014: 51) argues that "*habitus* focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others". Maton (2014: 58) also adds that "primary socialization in the family is for Bourdieu deeply formative and, though the habitus is shaped by ongoing contexts, this is slow and unconscious – our dispositions are not blown around easily on the tides of change in the social worlds we inhabit". An important notion with regard to habitus and the practices it gives rise to is social trajectory:

> The correlation between a practice and social origin /…/ is the resultant of two effects /…/: on the one hand, the inculcation effect directly exerted by the family or the original conditions of existence; on the other hand, the specific effect of social trajectory, that is, the effects of social rise or decline on dispositions and opinions, position of origin being, in this logic, merely the starting point of a trajectory (Bourdieu 2010: 105).

Even though habitus is initially shaped by social origin, divergent individual trajectories can result in divergent dispositions and stances even for members of the same family. Habitus is, therefore, shaped both by our social origin and later trajectory, essentially capturing our entire way of being, who we are as individuals. Instead of just focusing on practices, habitual ways of doing things, Bourdieu focuses on the principles underlying those habits, on what generates those habits. Habitus can be seen as the defining principle behind the way we see the social world around us; it encompasses our past and present experiences to determine our future preferences.

Habitus can, therefore, be seen as a theoretical concept enabling us to explain the actions agents undertake in social space. Maton (2014: 50) argues that "formally, Bourdieu defines habitus as a property of actors (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a "structured and structuring structure"", adding that "it is "structured" by one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences" and "it is "structuring" in that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices". Maton (2014: 50) also notes that "it is a "structure" in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned". In addition, "this "structure" comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices" (Maton 2014: 50). Habitus can, therefore, be summed up as a structured system of dispositions shaped by our past and shaping our present choices. Dispositions in themselves are habitual ways of doing things, predilections, inclinations, resulting from our experience of the world. "The habitus is thus both structured by material conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and so forth in accordance with its own structure" (Maton 2014: 50). Habitus is also "in a state of constant flux" (Hardy 2014: 127), changing just as the conditions of the field change.

The fact that habitus is structured by our past circumstances does not mean that "we are pre-programmed automatons acting out the implications of our upbringings" (Maton 2014: 50), but rather our practices result from the relationship between a habitus and a field. Bourdieu (2010: 95) uses the following formula to signify this relationship:

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice

Consequently, "one's practice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)" (Maton 2014: 50). An individual's dispositions combined with their total volume and composition of capital determines the kind of leverage they are able to have in a given field. Each of these concepts has a vital role to play in Bourdieu's approach, and in order to fully understand the way they function in social space, they should be viewed as inevitably interconnected. As noted by Maton (2014: 50), "practices are thus not simply the result of one's habitus but rather of *relations between* one's habitus and one's current circumstances". In a Bourdieusian analysis, practice is the result of the relation between habitus and field as social fields give meaning to individual habituses. The relationship between habitus and field is central to understanding how habitus works. Habitus is, therefore, a relational concept and cannot function in isolation – habitus and field together generate practices. Habitus cannot be reduced simply to social background, but needs to be analysed in the light of the social field that it functions in since the relational structure of the concept was essential to Bourdieu's approach.

Although Bourdieu does not deny individual free will and agency, he claims that our present is very much shaped by our past. Throughout his work, he emphasises the importance of location in social space in the formation of individual preferences. Bourdieu (2010: 166) maintains that "different conditions of existence produce different habitus". As noted by Maton (2014: 51), "we are engaged in a continuous process of making history,

but not under conditions entirely of our own making. Where we are in life at any one moment is the result of numberless events in the past that have shaped our path". Maton (2014: 51) adds that the choices we see for ourselves also depend on our past as our experiences have shaped our vision. The choices we end up making from the range of options available and visible to us in a particular field ultimately depend on our habitus. "Our choices will then in turn shape our future possibilities, for any choice involves foregoing alternatives and sets us on a particular path that further shapes our understanding of ourselves and of the world" (Maton 2014: 52). For Bourdieu, the choices we see for ourselves depend on our position in social space:

> Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences, differential positions, i.e., by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference (Bourdieu 2010: 166).

Individuals define themselves in opposition to others; therefore, our identity depends not only on what we believe in (our intrinsic properties) but also how we relate to others (relational properties).

Maton (2014: 52) has noted that "habitus is the link not only between past, present and future, but also between the social and the individual, the objective and the subjective, and structure and agency". Even though our individual experiences differ, we share the structure of our experiences with other members of our own social class. Maton (2014: 52) argues that "members of the same social class by definition share structurally similar positions within society that engender structurally similar experiences of social relations, processes and structures". Consequently, the way we experience the world depends on our structural position within the social hierarchy. Habitus also explains how social structures become internalised, bringing together the objective and the subjective. The practical logic individuals use to enhance their position in society links social structure and individual

agency. Maton (2014: 53) points out that "Bourdieu often uses the analogy of a game and the notion of "strategy" to emphasize the active, creative nature of practices". Without being completely guided by the rules of the game, the structure of the field, individuals can still use their practical logic to exercise strategies of navigating the social field. The structure/agency dichotomy is, therefore, brought together in the concept of habitus – our internalised dispositions are shaped by the logic of the field, but at the same time they help us to navigate that field. The notions of structure and agency – as well as the other dichotomies – are, consequently, brought together in the concept of habitus. As explained by Maton (2014: 54), "the habitus is thus, for Bourdieu, the crucial mediating link between a series of dualisms often portrayed by other approaches as dichotomous, and brings together the existence of social regularities with the experience of agency". That mediating link is in turn "intended to encourage us to think relationally" (Maton 2014: 54), to see the relations between different notions and transcend dichotomies. Simply put, habitus is the social embodied in the individual.

With regard to the effect individual habitus can have on one's prospects, Maton (2014: 57) points out that "innumerable stimuli during their upbringing shape the outlooks, beliefs and practices of actors in ways that impact upon their educational careers". That is why children from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to attend university than children from working-class backgrounds. Because of their upbringing, middle-class children see it as a natural step to go to university – they have been brought up with a different kind of mentality compared to working-class children. Maton (2014: 57) adds that "when at university they are also more likely to feel "at home", for the underlying principles generating practices within the university field – its unwritten "rules of the game" – are homologous to their own habituses". According to Maton (2014: 57), "Bourdieu says that people thereby internalize, through a protracted process of conditioning, the objective

chances they face – they come to "read" the future and to choose the fate that is also statistically the most likely for them". Our upbringing, therefore, has a huge impact on who we think we are and what we believe we can achieve. The past and our current material conditions of existence have shaped our habitus and in turn the habitus now conditions our beliefs. As noted by Maton (2014: 57), "it is our material conditions of existence that generate our innumerable experiences of possibilities and impossibilities, probable and improbable outcomes, that in turn shape our unconscious sense of the possible, probable and, crucially, desirable for us". Consequently, we end up choosing those outcomes for ourselves that are the most probable ones considering our social position. Maton (2014: 58) argues that "actors thereby come to gravitate towards those social fields (and positions within those fields) that best match their dispositions and to try to avoid those fields which involve a field-habitus clash".

Bourdieu (2010: 373) notes that the schemes of perception and appreciation individuals use to apprehend the world around them render habitus relevant. Habitus defines the way in which individuals relate to their conditions. According to Bourdieu (2010: 375), "the relation to class condition /…/ is part of a complete definition of that condition". Individuals belonging to different social classes will perceive the world in disparate ways because of their habitus, the lived experience shaping their understanding of and relation to the social world. To go one step further, one could say that to a great extent we are the products of our conditions as those conditions of existence have shaped our habitus, which now unconsciously guides our behaviour and thinking:

> The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will. Orienting practices practically, they embed what some would mistakenly call *values* in the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body—ways of walking or blowing one's nose, ways of eating or talking—and engage the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world, those which most directly express the division of labour (between the classes, the age groups and the sexes) or the division of the work of domination, in divisions between bodies and between relations to the body. (Bourdieu 2010: 468)

Habitus determines our understanding of the social world and the way we relate to and classify other individuals, while guiding our lifestyle choices. For Bourdieu (2010: 168), individual lifestyles are "the systematic products of habitus, which, perceived in their mutual relations through the schemes of the habitus, become sign systems that are socially qualified (as 'distinguished', 'vulgar' etc.)". Individuals will then judge each other on the basis of those sign systems, resulting in judgements of taste.

Field

As noted earlier, the concepts of habitus and field are inevitably interrelated in Bourdieu's analysis of individual practices. By itself, the concept of social field has little explanatory power, and Bourdieu aimed his concepts to be used in relation to each other (hence the formula *[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice* referred to in the previous section). Bourdieu has described the relationship between habitus and field as follows:

> The dispositions constituting the cultivated habitus are only formed, only function and are only valid in a field, in the relationship with a field which, as Gaston Bachelard says of the physical field, is itself a 'field of possible forces', a 'dynamic situation', in which forces are only manifested in their relationship with certain dispositions. This is why the same practices may receive opposite meanings and values in different fields, in different configurations or in opposing sectors of the same field. (Bourdieu 2010: 87).

In order to understand a social interaction, we need to know where it occurs. Simply knowing what happened is not enough, we need to relate it to the social space in which it happened. As systems of social positions, fields are the social arenas within which individuals compete for the social resources, different forms of capital, referred to earlier. According to Thomson (2014: 67), Bourdieu often compared social life itself to a game. She (2014: 67) notes that "the game that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive, with various agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of *capitals*: they are both the process in, and product

of a field". Bourdieu (2010: 107) argues that "because capital is a social relation, i.e., an energy which only exists and only produces its effects in the field in which it is produced and reproduced, each of the properties attached to class is given its value and efficacy by the specific laws of each field". Consequently, capital only has value in relation to a certain field and the relative importance of a certain type of capital depends on the field in question. However, those with more inherited capital have an advantage over those with less inherited capital already at the outset. This is why social background matters in the game of social life – it can give one an advantageous position to fight for their place in the social hierarchy. As noted by Thomson (2014: 67), "players who begin with particular forms of capital are advantaged at the outset because the field depends on, as well as produces more of, that capital". As a result, those individuals who enter the field with more capital than others are also able to advance further in the field.

Each field has its own specific logic of practice determining the rules of field behaviour. Fields, therefore, form distinctive units with their own rules, and the individuals occupying positions within them know how to behave in accordance with those rules. Thomson (2014: 68) points out that "collectives of people occupy more than one social field at a time. They/we can be thought of as occupying a common social space – Bourdieu called this the *field of power* – which consists of multiple social fields such as the economic field, the education field, the field of the arts, bureaucratic and political fields, and so on". The fields in turn bear similarities to each other as do the practices the agents undertake within the fields. Thomson (2014: 69) notes that "there are also relationships of exchange between fields which make them inter-dependent: for example, what kind of schooling people receive in the education field can make a lot of difference to how they are positioned in the economic field". Bourdieu highlights the structured nature of social space by claiming that:

> Individuals do not move about in social space in a random way, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space /…/, and partly because they resist the forces of the field with their specific inertia, that is, their properties, which may exist in embodied form, as dispositions, or in objectified form, in goods, qualifications etc. To a given volume of inherited capital there corresponds a band of more or less equally probable trajectories leading to more or less equivalent positions (this is the *field of the possibles* objectively offered to a given agent), and the shift from one trajectory to another often depends on collective events—wars, crises etc.—or individual events—encounters, affairs, benefactors etc.—which are usually described as (fortunate or unfortunate) accidents, although they themselves depend statistically on the position and disposition of those whom they befall. (Bourdieu 2010: 104)

This allows Bourdieu (2010: 104) to deduce that "position and individual trajectory are not statistically independent; all positions of arrival are not equally probable for all starting points. This implies that there is a strong correlation between social positions and the dispositions of the agents who occupy them". The position an individual occupies within a given field will inevitably shape their habitus.

Thomson (2014: 70) has noted that "economic capital brings more status and power than cultural capital, although both together are highly advantageous in the field of power". The social world, which makes up the field of power, consists of multiple fields that are in turn divided into subfields and all of those fields are interconnected. Although each field is highly hierarchical as it is made up of those who dominate and those who are dominated, Bourdieu leaves enough room for individual agency – individuals do not move about in social space in a mechanical way, neither are they omniscient participants fully aware of their own position and the ways in which the field functions, but they use their practical sense to improve their position within the field. Consequently, they use what they have to make the best of their situation. Individuals will need to use a certain type of capital depending on the field in question. Different fields require different types of capital in order to succeed in them. As Bourdieu (2010: 107) claims, "it is the specific logic of the field, of what is at stake and of the type of capital needed to play for it, which governs those properties through which the relationship between class and practice is established". The power that individuals are assigned in a particular field depends "firstly on the specific

capital they can mobilize" (Bourdieu 2010: 107). Bourdieu claims that two types of movement are possible in the social space for individuals trying to improve their position:

> The social space, being structured in two dimensions (overall capital volume and dominant/ dominated capital), allows two types of movement which traditional mobility studies confuse, although they are in no way equivalent and are unequally probable: vertical movements, upwards or downwards, in the same vertical sector, that is, in the same field (e.g., from schoolteacher to professor, or from small businessman to big businessman); and transverse movements, from one field to another, which may occur either horizontally (a schoolteacher, or his son, becomes a small shopkeeper) or between different levels (a shopkeeper, or his son, becomes an industrialist). Vertical movements, the most frequent ones, only require an increase in the volume of the type of capital already dominant in the asset structure, and therefore a movement in the structure of the distribution of total capital which takes the form of a movement within a field (business field, academic field, administrative field, medical field etc.). Transverse movements entail a shift into another field and the reconversion of one type of capital into another or of one sub-type into another sub-type (e.g., from landowning to industrial capital or from literature to economics) and therefore a transformation of asset structure which protects overall capital volume and maintains position in the vertical dimension. (Bourdieu 2010: 126)

Regardless of whether the movement is vertical or transverse, individuals will need to refer to their capital portfolio to change their position in social space. Everything that happens in a field, and what individuals can achieve in a given field, therefore, depends on their overall capital volume and composition.

Taste

Taste can be seen as resulting from individual systems of dispositions, forming an integral part of one's habitus. According to Bourdieu (2010: 208), "agents apprehend objects through the schemes of perception and appreciation of their habitus". The agents' perception of the objects defines their value for them, and the way they perceive things derives from their habitus, from what they are accustomed to and find inherently natural. We also judge other people on the basis of their habitus – the way they speak, behave, walk, etc. We cannot control the signals we are sending out to other individuals on the basis of which we are judged, because the schemes of the habitus cannot be consciously controlled as they function below the level of consciousness.

Bourdieu (2010: 169) calls taste "the generative formula of life-style" as it determines all of the aesthetic preferences individuals are likely to have. As such, "taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs, of continuous distributions into discontinuous oppositions" (Bourdieu 2010: 170). Those signs refer to, for instance, clothing, pronunciation and manners on the basis of which judgements are made and sympathies expressed. Bourdieu considers taste to be:

> A match-maker; it marries colours and also people, who make 'well-matched couples', initially in regard to taste. All the acts of co-option which underlie 'primary groups' are acts of knowledge of others qua subjects of acts of knowledge or, in less intellectualist terms, sign-reading operations (particularly visible in first encounters) through which a habitus confirms its affinity with other habitus. (Bourdieu 2010: 239)

Individuals with a certain kind of habitus spontaneously choose other individuals with a similar habitus by making judgements of taste, thus forming socially well-matched relationships. People are often unaware of this kind of co-option, operating simply on the basis of likes and dislikes. Simply put, we choose to spend time with like-minded people, people who like the things that we like and do the things that we do.

An individual's aesthetic judgements are dependent on the specific position they inhabit in social space; consequently, social position determines taste. As Bourdieu (2010: 46) claims, the aesthetic disposition depends on an individual's "past and present material conditions of existence". Hence the importance of social positions – social positions shape individual habituses, and the tastes individuals are likely to have. The threat posed by aesthetic judgements lies in the fact that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu 2010: xxix). According to Bourdieu (2010: 469), social agents are "producers not only of classifiable acts but also of acts of classification which are themselves classified". As classifying and classifiable acts, judgements of taste not only derive from one's social position, but function as acts of social positioning. Taste enables people from one social group to categorise other people as either belonging to their own group or some

other group on the basis of aesthetic judgements, creating divisions between individuals along the lines of marked preferences.

By associating ourselves with people whose tastes match our own, we distinguish ourselves from people who are different from us. Those people are more often than not from another class as our tastes and habituses are shaped by our material conditions of existence. As a result, class boundaries are created and people are divided by their aesthetic choices. Bourdieu (2010: xxix) notes that "social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed". Consequently, tastes will begin to function as markers of class. We are different because we make different choices, and we judge other people on the basis of those choices, which is exactly what creates divisions in society. Bourdieu (2010: 485) suggests that "a class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*, by its consumption—which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic—as much as by its position in the relations of production (even if it is true that the latter governs the former)". Class, therefore, is not only about how much money one has, but also what they decide to do with that money, and how they decide to present themselves to the world since that is what they ultimately will be judged upon.

Bourdieu (2010: 47) calls the aesthetic disposition that enables classifications "a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function", adding that such a disposition "can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency". Consequently, in order for the aesthetic disposition to develop and thrive, one needs to be removed from the restrictive demands of economic necessity. Bourdieu (2010: 48) claims that "the tastes of freedom can only assert themselves as such in relation to the

tastes of necessity, which are thereby brought to the level of the aesthetic and so defined as vulgar". The different tastes only exist through each other as their value is generated in the opposition. Bourdieu calls the aesthetic disposition:

> A distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space whose distinctive value is objectively established in its relationship to expressions generated from different conditions. Like every sort of taste it unites and separates. Being the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others. (Bourdieu 2010: 49)

Taste is the product of one's social conditions of existence, and it unites people with similar conditions and separates people with distinct conditions.

For Bourdieu (2010: 49), "tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes". Bourdieu (2010: 49) adds that "in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of the tastes of others". He (2010: 192) also claims that "each life-style can only really be constructed in relation to the other, which is its objective and subjective negation". Since tastes form a part of individual habituses, then they always feel natural, which is why individuals are often unaware of the symbolic violence they inflict on others through their judgements of taste. Bourdieu (2010: 49) claims that "aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes; class endogamy is evidence of this". That is one of the reasons why it can be difficult to establish relationships across class boundaries – we are more likely to choose people from similar backgrounds, with similar tastes and habituses.

Aesthetic judgements are more often made by members of the dominant class, who having been freed from the constraints of economic necessity are also more able to develop

their aesthetic refinement. In fact, they often use taste as a weapon against the dominated classes as taste helps them to assert their difference. Bourdieu (2010: 50) notes that "as for the working classes, perhaps their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations". Bourdieu (2010: 53) adds that aesthetic choices are often constituted "in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate, and more precisely, no doubt, in relation to those choices most clearly marked by the intention (perceived as pretension) of marking distinction vis-à-vis lower groups". Taste is, therefore, often used by groups higher in social space as a strategic weapon to mark their distinction.

Bourdieu (2010: 94) argues that "objects, even industrial products, are not objective in the ordinary sense of the word, i.e., independent of the interest and tastes of those who perceive them, and they do not impose the self-evidence of a universal, unanimously approved meaning". The way objects are perceived depends on the agent, and products are used to convey social identity. Individuals can, thereby, express their identity and tastes through items such as clothing. For Bourdieu, no decision is ever neutral, and whatever we decide to associate ourselves with classifies us:

> Each consumer is confronted by a particular state of the supply side, that is, with objectified possibilities (goods, services, patterns of action etc.) the appropriation of which is one of the stakes in the struggles between the classes, and which, because of their probable association with certain classes or class fractions, are automatically classified and classifying, rank-ordered and rank-ordering (Bourdieu 2010: 220).

Products, therefore, function as means of distinction by classifying their owners. Luxury goods, for instance, give their owners distinctive status due to exclusive possession. Exclusivity is what grants them status, and their value would only be diminished if they became more attainable. Bourdieu (2010: 95) also notes that it is necessary to include "in the complete definition of the product the differential experiences which the consumers

have of it as a function of the dispositions they derive from their position in economic space". Bourdieu, therefore, considers taste to be economically and socially determined, inevitably dependent on one's position in social space. As he (2010: 173) notes, "taste is *amor fati*, the choice of destiny, but a forced choice, produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary". For Bourdieu, our tastes are to a large extent determined by our conditions of existence, by what is necessary for us considering our position in social space.

The concepts observed in this chapter will be employed in the following discussion of social class in Smith's *NW*, which will also make it possible to check whether they help to understand the formation of class boundaries within a fictional context. If we proceed from the premise that Bourdieu's theoretical framework helps to explain how class functions and how divisions are created between individuals, using these concepts may also add a valuable explanatory level to the analysis of the social context of this specific work of fiction. The following chapter will first give a short overview of the novel in the context of the author's life and work and then provide a detailed analysis of its social setting with the help of Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

Zadie Smith

Zadie Smith, born in 1975, is a widely acclaimed contemporary British novelist, essayist and short story writer, whose work has not only been critically acclaimed but has also enjoyed considerable commercial success over the years. Leigh Wilson (2006: 108) has noted that Smith is "one of few contemporary novelists to have received both critical and popular acclaim". Her work mainly focuses on the cultural, religious and ethnic diversities describing the realities of modern urban living, especially the cultural diversities of contemporary Londoners in search of their own identity. Philip Tew (2010: 15) has suggested that Smith's writing often incorporates structures and themes "concerned largely with family, community and possibilities (and impossibilities) of belonging".

Smith has published four novels to date. Her first novel, *White Teeth* (2000), a vibrant portrait of contemporary cross-cultural, cross-generational London, was an astonishing literary debut for the author. It was followed by the less acclaimed *The Autograph Man* (2002), a story of grief, obsession and the perils of celebrity told through the perspective of a Jewish-Chinese north Londoner buying and selling autographs for a living. Her third novel, the Man Booker-shortlisted *On Beauty* (2005), touches upon issues of ethnic diversity while focusing on the story of two transatlantic academic families. By the publication of her fourth novel, *NW* (2012), Smith, who has received numerous awards and prizes, had been established as one of the foremost contemporary British novelists. In addition to novels, she has also written an essay collection, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (2009), and the long short story *The Embassy of Cambodia* (2013).

Smith was born in the Willesden area of northwest London to a Jamaican mother and an English father. Her mixed heritage has given rise to many of the themes prevalent in her fiction. In an interview explaining why she feels herself to be a distinctly British novelist writing about distinctly British themes often focusing on the same London borough, Smith has claimed: "I just feel I'm a writer of a particular place and I can't really disguise it" (Bollen 2012: para. 15). Her writing is rooted in her own experience of multicultural London, focusing on the themes she finds personally relevant. As noted by Smith (Bollen 2012: para. 15): "You write about what you care about". Here Smith seems to acknowledge her own positioning in social space and the effect it has on her as she embraces her origins in her writing. This links in with Bourdieu's belief in an author's inevitable socio-historical positioning – as Grenfell (2014: 3) has suggested, "Bourdieu always insisted that his work be set in the times which produced it". An author's understanding of the social world depends to a great extent on their experience of it as the author's experiences of the world have essentially given rise to their understanding of social space and the way they render it on the page. This does not mean that the book is autobiographical, but instead, the author's being gives rise to their writing.

Some have criticised (e.g., Driscoll 2009) Smith's approach to her own class belonging and the way she portrays her characters' class status in her writing. For instance, Driscoll has claimed:

> Whenever Smith is presented to us by the media, the information we are usually given is that she is of mixed race, with a Caucasian father and a Jamaican mother: the implication being that this racial information is enough to inform us of everything essential. But such an introduction is rather slippery as it fails to inform us of her *class*. Similarly, book jackets laconically tell us that she was simply "born in northwest London" and "still lives in the area" implying that she has somehow remained true to her "roots." If, on the other hand, we were told that her father was a photographer and her mother a psychologist and that Smith did a degree in literature at Cambridge, and is now currently Fellow in Residence of Creative Writing at Harvard, her class profile looks somewhat different. (Driscoll 2009: 63)

Driscoll is suggesting that Smith is somehow trying to avoid or dismiss her own class belonging. However, such criticism can be seen as largely unfounded as Smith has often in

interviews referred to her working-class roots (see e.g., Bollen 2012) and still maintains that she sees herself first and foremost as working class or lower middle class because of her background (see e.g., *Start the Week* 2013). What Driscoll is referring to is Smith's ability to move up the social ladder; that, however, does not mean that she is denying her roots. The fact that she has remained true to the area she grew up in – both in real life and in her writing – despite her upwardly mobile social trajectory is in itself rather revealing. As she (*Start the Week* 2013) states: "I was born and bred there, been there my entire life. I grew up on an estate on one side of the road, and I guess as an example of social mobility I bought the house opposite". Since she openly recognises her working-class background, we cannot dismiss her so easily as a middle-class writer just because of her social mobility – an author can move up the social ladder and still remain true to her roots, and Smith's fiction is a superb example of that as she writes about socially diverse characters occupying a corner of modern Britain she knows so well.

NW

In *NW* (2012), Smith explores the issue of class in modern London more explicitly than in her previous works. David Marcus (2013: para. 23) has even called *NW* "a work of fiction built on the clipped images, solicitudes, and often spectral traumas of class". In her fiction, Smith often returns to the northwest corner of London she first visited in *White Teeth*, and *NW* is no exception to that as it centres on her native Willesden. Smith draws on some of her own early experiences of growing up on a council estate (Bollen 2012: para. 25) as the novel follows the lives of four Londoners called Leah, Felix, Natalie and Nathan who grew up together on the same fictional Caldwell estate but whose lives have since taken divergent paths.

The novel is divided into five sections: *Visitation*, *Guest*, *Host*, *Crossing* and *Visitation* again. The first section centres on Leah, *Guest* on Felix, and *Host*, the longest section of the novel, focuses on Natalie while the last two sections first bring together Natalie and Nathan and then Natalie and Leah. Nathan is the only main character who does not have an entire section devoted to him; his appearance is rare but turns out to be decisive in the end. The stylistically distinct sections echo the disconnectedness of the characters' lives. The language used is fractured, the sections are intentionally imbalanced, capital letters and bold fonts are used for emphasis, words are rearranged and the narrative voice shifts with the aim of capturing the characters, their language and their lives in all their complexities. Smith also experiments with Joycean techniques, including stream-of-consciousness writing and presenting dialogue without inverted commas. However, Marcus (2013: para. 21) notes that "instead of Joyce's roving and associative stream of consciousness, Smith's is empirical, cartographic, and sharply focused on the spiritual trauma and material limits of poverty". *NW* can be called a work of experimental realism trying to capture the acuity of the sometimes chaotic experience of urban living, a work that mixes modernist techniques with social realism. Smith (2013: para.2) has commented on the style of the novel: "When I was writing this novel what I really wanted to do was create people in language". The shifts in style and voice are there to capture the essence of the characters – the form of the novel aims to reflect its content as each section reflects the mindset of the character it centres on.

The narrative is mainly driven by the characters. As Christian Lorentzen (2012: para. 4) has argued, "this is less a plot than a set of hooks on which Smith can hang her portrait of North-West London and sketches of characters from various points on the class spectrum". The novel encompasses separate worlds existing side by side in a socially divided city; there are hosts and guests, those with social power and those without it,

whose lives become interspersed with visitations by the truly deprived. Not once does Smith state that the novel is in any way about class, but the gradations separating the worlds inhabited by the characters become implicitly manifest through the social markers used by the author. Those markers are what the following analysis will be looking at through the prism of Bourdieu's theory in order to establish how the author conveys the social context that in many ways defines the characters' lives and the distinctions separating individuals living in such close quarters. As the narrative is largely driven by the characters, the following analysis will also focus on the main characters individually.

Leah

The opening section of the novel, *Visitation*, focuses on Leah Hanwell, a redheaded white woman of Irish-English descent in her mid-thirties. She has an administrative job in the council, working for a good cause, "the only white girl on the Fund Distribution Team" (*NW* 2013: 37). Leah is married to Michel, a forward-looking French-Algerian hairdresser from Marseilles who has moved to London with the hopes of moving up the social ladder to make a better life for them both. On the outside, life should be great for Leah, she has a "proper family-orientated" (*NW* 2013: 36) husband and a seemingly satisfying job, but Leah is not happy – neither does she want to have children nor does she feel contented with the job.

Already in the very first paragraph Smith introduces us to the idea that will guide the rest of the narrative. As Leah is keeping to the shade in a hammock in the back garden of her basement flat on an unusually hot April day, she hears the line "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me" (*NW* 2013: 3) on the radio, and thinks she should write it out on the back of a magazine. Since "pencil leaves no mark on magazine pages" (*NW* 2013: 3), she fails to write it out properly, resulting in the hesitant marking of "I am the

sole / I am the sole author / I am the / the sole / I am the sole / the sole / the sole" (*NW* 2013: 3). The difficulty of writing it out suggests hesitance in the probability of the line being true. Smith is already in the beginning trying to pose the question of whether we really are the sole authors of our lives or whether the course of our lives is determined by the socioeconomic circumstances we are born into. Smith (Medley 2012: para. 4) has claimed that she wanted this to be "an existentialist book about London, in which people live in a lot of uncertainty". The novel is a reflection on the existential struggle to define oneself as a human being. Leah is experiencing this struggle already on the very first page.

When we try to approach the struggle to define oneself as a human being from a class-conscious perspective, we are met with an intellectual cul-de-sac, trying to solve a question that seems almost unsolvable: are we really the sole authors of the dictionaries that define us or are the paths available to us to varying degrees determined by our starting points? In many ways, *NW* really is an existentialist novel as the idea of the possibility of individual authorship of one's life frames the entire work. When we try to approach this question from the vantage point of Bourdieu's theory, we will have to concede that even though individuals can exercise agency to change the course of their lives, their chances are initially determined by their social origin as location in social space shapes an individual's experiences, life chances and habitus. "The strategies individuals adopt to advance themselves and their families" (Grenfell 2014: 22) effectively result in social stratification and closure of ranks, meaning that a child born into an underprivileged family will be disadvantaged from the outset.

Marcus (2013: para. 25) has also suggested that *NW* is concerned with "the clear, determined aspects of inequality: those determinacies born out of where we live and what we do. We are not the sole authors of the dictionaries that define us". Therefore, our life trajectory depends on a number of factors – such as social origin and cultural capital – that

impact upon our chances in life. Naturally, each individual has to take responsibility for their choices, as the existentialists would have it, but Bourdieu believes that since individuals are born into a stratified society, into a family that is either privileged or underprivileged and their primary socialisation takes place in the family, then the circumstances of their social origin can either give them an advantage or a disadvantage. Therefore, success can be seen as depending more on making the most of the hand of cards one has been dealt in the game of life than simply being the sole author of one's life.

Consequently, social origin matters and it helps to explain why the characters have such diverging social trajectories in the novel. Smith (Medley 2012: para. 15) herself has claimed that "it's not true that we make our own lives", and as an example, she has made a reference to her own social mobility, noting, "I had good parents. I had a lot of luck. The circumstances of my birth were luck, whereas my friend who turned out the way she did, she had completely different circumstances". Here, Smith is emphasising the importance of the conditions one is born into in determining the kind of chances they are likely to have in life, which is also in line with Bourdieu's approach to class. The main characters in her novel all grew up on the same council estate, hence, they had the same initial location in social space, but they were born into different families with different kinds of parents so their capital portfolio differs as well. Leah's parents did not have a lot of economic capital, but they made sure she was able to take the kind of extracurricular lessons she wanted to (*NW* 2013: 75), which in turn resulted in the increase of her cultural capital.

Significantly, the garden Leah is sitting in at the beginning of the novel is "fenced in, on all sides" (*NW* 2013: 3), a reference to the kind of isolation and seclusion granted by a middle-class lifestyle that enables one to shut out the rest of the city and the separate worlds inhabiting it, a way of living in blissful ignorance of the kind of lives lived by other people. "Four gardens along, in the estate" there is a girl screaming "Anglo-Saxon at

nobody" (*NW* 2013: 3), but the sounds Leah hears come almost as if from another world, a world she has nothing to do with. The visitation that disrupts Leah's seclusion comes when she answers the doorbell to find a desperate young woman crying and pleading "PLEASE – oh my God help me – please Miss, I live here – I live just here, please God – check, please" (*NW* 2013: 5) while pushing a bill through the gap in the doorway to show her the address. It is important for the stranger to emphasise that she lives in the same area to be taken seriously, to show that she belongs and establish a kind of communality with the stranger whose life she is trying to intrude into. Once Leah sees that the address on the bill is "a street on the corner of her own" (*NW* 2013: 5), she lets the stranger in – the idea being that if she is a neighbour, then she cannot be dangerous.

As the woman comes in, wailing, she once again emphasises "I'm local. I live here" (*NW* 2013: 6) and introduces herself as Shar. Leah feels sorry for the woman and thinks that "perhaps Shar needs money. Her clothes are not clean" (*NW* 2013: 6), making a judgement about the woman on the basis of her appearance: "in the back of her right knee there is a wide tear in the nasty fabric. Dirty heels rise up out of disintegrating flip-flops. She smells" (*NW* 2013: 6). Shar claims that she needs money to get to the hospital to see her mother who had a heart attack. While they wait in the kitchen for the taxi to arrive, Leah is making tea for Shar and noting to herself, "this is not the country for making a stranger tea" (*NW* 2013: 8), suggesting that there is no hospitality between strangers from different socioeconomic circumstances, a reference to the classist nature of British society. Shar recognises the class divide between herself and the people living on Leah's street when she says: "Proper snobby, this street. You the only one let me in. Rest of them wouldn't piss on you if you was on fire" (*NW* 2013: 13)

Fischer (2013: 25) has noted that the "visitation" in the beginning of the novel reminds Leah of her class origins. Shar recognises Leah from school, claiming, "You went

Brayton!" (*NW* 2013: 9). They went to the same school, "it was rubbish but /…/ quite a few people did all right" (*NW* 2013: 11), Leah being one of them. As Shar notes, Leah has "done well" (*NW* 2013: 12). Shar and Leah are no longer in the same socioeconomic class and from her insulated middle-class position, Leah no longer sees the circumstances of Shar's life – it is as if they inhabit separate worlds despite living in the same area. Shar is stuck in her underprivileged position with an abusive husband and no money while Leah has moved on to a comfortable middle-class lifestyle and has a nice husband and a dog called "Olive" (*NW* 2013: 10). Bourdieu's (2010: 376) claim that "no one ever really puts himself 'in the place' of those on the other side of the social world" helps to explain why Leah finds Shar's life so alien. The different amounts of economic capital these two women have helps to explain the gap between their social worlds as an individual's economic position is likely to blind them to the material conditions of existence experienced by other members of society. As necessity depends on point of view, Leah finds it difficult to relate to Shar. Although Leah does not have a lot of economic capital, she has enough for a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. She was born and raised on a council estate just four buildings down the road, but her life looks insurmountably different now: "From there to here, a journey longer than it looks" (*NW* 2013: 12).

Shar promises to "come by tomorrow" (*NW* 2013: 15) and pay back the money, but she never does and after the event, "it is obvious to everyone except Leah" (*NW* 2013: 16) that Shar was deceiving her. That visitation sends Leah throughout the rest of the novel as she cannot forget about Shar. At first, Leah is unwilling to believe that she was simply deceived as she says: "What does it mean to say the girl lied? Is it a lie to say she was desperate? She was desperate enough to come to the door" (*NW* 2013: 22). While Michel dismisses Shar, saying that she is "A crackhead. A thief. It's not so interesting" (*NW* 2013: 22), Leah is unable to move on. Over the next months Leah is constantly thinking about the

girl, going through various emotions from anger to contempt to guilt as she meets Shar on the street several times. Ruth Franklin (2012: para. 12) has noted that "Leah is your typical white middle-class Englishwoman, hounded by liberal guilt". Even though Leah is not completely satisfied with her life, she feels guilty about having a better life than Shar. They went to the same school, but have ended up with divergent life trajectories, the reality of which Leah cannot comprehend when she says: "I just don't understand why I have this life /…/ Why that girl and not us" (*NW* 2013: 331). Their divergent trajectories have also resulted in divergent dispositions – not only does their economic position in society differ but they also behave, dress and speak differently.

When Leah was growing up her mother, Pauline, was a general nurse who retrained to become a radiographer and her father, Colin, worked for the council. So Leah comes from a lower middle class family rather than a distinctly working class family. As a reference to mobility, we learn that before Leah goes off to university her parents move out of the Caldwell estate: "The Hanwells were moving into a maisonette. Practically Maida Vale /…/ the shared garden, the three bedrooms. Something called a 'study'" (*NW* 2013: 197). Yet somehow Leah is always held back by her council estate childhood. Even now that she is renting a council flat with her husband, she seems to be insecure about not owning her own home, or more so the insecurity is instilled in her by her aspiring husband. When Shar is in Leah's flat and says that she has a nice place, Leah seems to dismiss it by replying: "Not ours – we rent – ours is just this – there's two flats upstairs. Shared garden. It's council, so …" (*NW* 2013: 8). Leah seems to feel insecure about her social standing and what she has achieved in life, feeling that she should have achieved more. Yet the fact that "from her new neighbours Leah has learnt that Quinton Primary is a good enough place to buy a croissant but not a good enough place to send your children" (*NW* 2013: 20) suggests that she lives in a rather middle-class environment now as the middle classes put greater

emphasis on their children's education, using it as a strategy to maintain and advance their social position. Smith often uses such casual markers to refer to class belonging, never explicitly mentioning that the neighbours are middle-class parents but subtly indicating their class status by referring to their concerns in a conversational manner.

Leah's husband, Michel, is desperate to have children; Leah, on the other hand, does not want to have children but is unwilling to admit it because of the social pressure that she feels, so she secretly has an abortion and starts taking the pill. Leah's unwillingness to have children can also be seen as a way of trying to escape the reproduction of her social standing in addition to the more obvious feminist undercurrent of a woman's right to choose what she does with her body. Michel is aspiring towards greater social mobility when he says: "Seven years ago: you were on the dole. I was washing hair. Things change! We're getting there, no?" (*NW* 2013: 24), but Leah "does not know where there is" (*NW* 2013: 24). Leah has conflicted feelings about where she should be headed; on the one hand, "she is happy enough in the moment they are in. She feels she deserves exactly what she has, no more, no less" (*NW* 2013: 24), but on the other hand, she feels as if she is sitting on her laurels (*NW* 2013: 28) and should be aspiring to greater heights:

> Question: what happened to her classmates, those keen young graduates, most of them men? Bankers, lawyers. Meanwhile Leah, a state-school wild card, with no Latin, no Greek, no maths, no foreign language, did badly – by the standards of the day – and now sits on a replacement chair borrowed six years ago from the break room, just flooded with empathy. (*NW* 2013: 32)

Her insecurity is caused by the prevalent mentality in society that demands one to achieve more than one has. Leah could be happy with the way things are, if she did not feel social pressure to achieve more, and would stop comparing herself to her best friend Natalie.

"Sometimes bitterness makes a grab for Leah. Pulls her down, holds her. What was the point of it all? Three years of useless study. Out of pocket, out of her depth" (*NW* 2013: 33). She neither had the economic capital to pay for her studies nor the cultural capital to feel at home at university. On philosophy, the degree she studied for at first, she notes:

> Philosophy is listening to warbling posh boys, it is being more bored than you have ever been in your life, more bored than you thought it possible to be. It is wishing yourself anywhere else, in a different spot somewhere in the multiverse, which is a concept you will never truly understand. In the end, only one idea reliably retained: time as a relative experience, different for the jogger, the lover, the tortured, the leisured. (*NW* 2013: 33)

Here, Smith can be seen emphasising the idea that individuals from different conditions of existence experience the world differently, a central tenet of Bourdieu's theory that he explains through the connection between habitus and field. Leah feels resentful about the disconnection she experiences between her background and her university education: "what was the purpose of preparing for a life never intended for her? Years too disconnected from everything else to feel real" (*NW* 2013: 33). As she grew up in a culturally underprivileged family, she lacks the cultural capital needed to feel truly at ease in the university environment, that kind of cultural capital does not form a part of her habitus, which is why the university years seem too disconnected from everything else, from everything she knew before, to feel real. Consequently, Leah is struggling to feel that she truly belongs despite her "fancy degree" (*NW* 2013: 33).

Michel is determined to have a life different from that of his family, so he has moved to England as he believes that there are more opportunities for a black man in England:

> Look: you know what is the true difference between these people and me? They don't want to move forward, they don't want to have nothing better than this. But I'm always moving forward, thinking of the next thing. People back home, they don't get me at all. I'm too advanced for them. So when they try to contact me, I don't let this – I don't let drama in my life like that. No way! I've worked too hard. I love you too much, this life. You are what you do. This is how it is. I'm always thinking: is this me? What I'm doing? Is this really me? If I sit and do nothing I know that makes me nothing. From the first day I was stepping into this country I have my head on correctly; I was very clear: I am coming up the ladder, one rung at least. In France, you're African, you're Algerian, who wants to know? There's no opportunity, you can't move! Here, you can move. You still have to work! You have to work very hard to separate yourself from this drama below! This is my point: I don't like to let it in. But this is what *you* do, perfect example, this girl, *you* let her in – I don't even know what is in your mind – but I don't allow this drama in. I know this country has opportunities if you want to grab them, you can do it. /…/ We're all just trying to take that next, that next, next, *step*. Climbing that ladder. *Brent Housing Partnership*. I don't want to have this written on the front of a place where I am living. I walk past it I feel like *oof* – it's humiliating to me. If we ever have a little boy I want him to live somewhere – to live *proud* – somewhere we have the freehold. (*NW* 2013: 29)

Michel is reproaching Leah for feeling guilty about Shar and not wanting to move up the social ladder hard enough. He does not feel sorry for Shar or anyone else who is deprived

like her, because he thinks that ultimately they are to be blamed for their own misfortune – in his opinion, they simply have not worked hard enough, an opinion that will later be echoed by Natalie. Michel believes that only the select few will become truly successful and he intends to be one of them by working hard. As he claims: "not everyone can be invited to the party. Not this century. Cruel opinion – she doesn't share it" (*NW* 2013: 3).

With the kind of salaries that Leah and Michel have at the moment they do not have enough economic capital to have a freehold, so Michel is trying to earn more money online, trading with the eight thousand pounds they have, "Leah's only inheritance from Hanwell, their only savings" (*NW* 2013: 49). Michel says to Leah: "This is why I'm on the laptop every night, I'm trying to do this – because it's pure market on there, nothing about skin, about is your English perfect, do you have the right piece of university paper or some bullshit like this. I can trade like anyone" (*NW* 2013: 30). Michel seems to equate social mobility with economic means – the more money you have, the higher you are in the hierarchy – and fails to understand that economic capital alone does not guarantee social mobility. One of the reasons why he fails to earn more by trading online is the lack of familiarity with the field – he does not have the knowledge to succeed in the economic field and he also lacks the social capital that could help him on. Michel wants to become successful like Natalie's husband, Frank, but Frank is a banker by profession with all the credentials legitimate membership grants. He even warns Michel: "now look, I don't want to be responsible for you losing your shirt, Michel … I work for one of the big boys, you see, and we have a sort of safety net" (*NW* 2013: 66).

One of the reasons why Leah cannot feel satisfied with her life is the fact that she constantly keeps comparing herself to Natalie, feeling inadequate in comparison. Natalie and Leah grew up together on the Caldwell estate and have been friends since they were four years old. For Leah, Natalie seemingly has the perfect life – she has become a

successful barrister, owns her own home and seems to live a happy family life. Smith expresses the difference in their social standing through taste markers. For instance, when Natalie and Frank hold a dinner party, they serve their guests "banana bread" (*NW* 2013: 65), "heirloom tomato salad" (*NW* 2013: 86) and "green beans with shaved almonds" (*NW* 2013: 87). They have a gazebo in their backyard and their lawn is well-kept (*NW* 2013: 60). Even Leah calls their life a "bourgeois existence" (*NW* 2013: 67). Such markers effectively express Natalie and Leah's diverging social trajectories. As Bourdieu insists, class is about what one does with their economic means, how they express themselves through their taste.

When Leah looks at Frank, she thinks: "He is handsome his shirt is perfect his trousers are perfect his children are perfect his wife is perfect this is a perfectly chilled glass of Prosecco" (*NW* 2013: 61). He even "smells expensive" (*NW* 2013: 61). Everything about Frank and Natalie's life is in stark contrast to her own and Michel's life. The always aspiring Michel is eager to have a good relationship with them, but Leah notes: "He can't see that we're boring them, and they wish they were free of us, of this old obligation" (*NW* 2013: 61). Leah's parents never gave dinner parties, so "nothing in Leah's childhood prepared her for the frequency with which she now attends dinner parties, most often at Natalie's house, where she and Michel are invited to provide something like local colour. Neither of them knows what to say to barristers and bankers, to the occasional judge" (*NW* 2013: 85). The fact that Natalie and Frank mainly have only other barristers and bankers as their friends is an example of how taste works as people usually choose to associate themselves with people who are similar to themselves. Since taste is economically and socially determined, Natalie and Leah's tastes and lifestyles differ, and Leah and Michel cannot help but to feel the difference when they visit. The difference in their economic and social capital makes them feel socially inferior to Natalie and Frank.

As upper middle class parents usually do, Natalie and Frank's friends want to reproduce their social position for their children, and, unlike Leah and Michel, they also have the economic means for that: "Don't you just want to give your individual child the very best opportunities you can give them individually?" (*NW* 2013: 87) one of them notes. The emphasis here is also on the word *individual*, on the individuality and isolation granted by an upper middle class lifestyle – "there is a perfect isolation out there somewhere, you can get it, although it doesn't come cheap" (*NW* 2013: 87). Michel envies Natalie and Frank's lifestyle and wants to achieve the same level of success: "Natalie laughs. Frank laughs. Michel laughs hardest. Slightly drunk. Not only on the Prosecco in his hand. On the grandeur of this Victorian house, the length of the garden, that he should know a barrister and a banker, that he should find funny the things they find funny" (*NW* 2013: 60). However, what he fails to understand is that their lifestyle is not just the result of economic privilege but also cultural and social privilege as they are better educated and socially better connected, aspects that all intersect in the production of their position. As Crossley (2014: 86) notes, "power and dominance derive not only from possession of material resources but also from possession of cultural and social resources".

Natalie makes Leah feel inadequate, somehow incompetent, as if she has failed in life in comparison to her oldest friend. "Leah watches Natalie stride over to her beautiful kitchen with her beautiful child. Everything behind those French doors is full and meaningful. The gestures, the glances, the conversation that can't be heard. How do you get to be so full? And so full of only meaningful things? Everything else Nat has somehow managed to cast off" (*NW* 2013: 66) she thinks to herself. She does not know, of course, that Natalie is secretly going through her own identity crisis. Leah feels particularly alienated from Natalie and Frank's life when she looks at Frank: "Aside from accidents of genetics, Frank has nothing to do with either Leah or Michel. She met his mother once.

Elena. Complained about the provincialism of Milan and advised Leah to dye her hair" (*NW* 2013: 61). For Leah, "Frank is from a different slice of the multiverse" (*NW* 2013: 61) as he grew up in completely different socioeconomic conditions. Everything about their social trajectories differs, including the kind of schools they attended. When Frank asks Leah "Why is it that everyone from your school is a criminal crackhead?" (*NW* 2013: 61), she replies, "Why's everyone from yours a Tory minister?" (*NW* 2013: 61). The exchange between them can be seen as a reflection on the divisiveness of the British education system – the kind of school one has access to can determine their future prospects.

Leah makes judgements about other people just like all the other characters in the novel. For instance, she mistakenly thinks that a boy standing in the phone box is Nathan, as she thinks that Nathan was the one who called her and threatened her to leave Shar alone, so Michel hurries over to him because "a wife's honour must be defended" (*NW* 2013: 79). She has made a judgement about the boy on the basis of how he is dressed – "the cap, the hooded top, the low jeans, it's a uniform – they look the same" (*NW* 2013: 81). It is a negative uniform for her, the uniform of dangerous lowlifes. Leah's judgement of the boy depends on her own social position and in turn positions the boy, leading to a class distinction as Leah defines herself in opposition to him. In addition, the language characters use conveys their social status – language as a form of cultural capital matters in drawing class distinctions between individuals. In the social context of the novel, the working-class characters, and especially the members of the deprived underclass, speak very differently from all the other characters higher in the social hierarchy. They often use slang words, swear words and grammatically incorrect sentences. For instance, the hooded boy in the phone box says to Michel: "I don't know what you're chattin about bruv but you BEST NOT STEP TO ME" (*NW* 2013: 81). Also, Shar says things like "I ain't got your money, yeah? I've got a problem. Do you understand me? I AIN'T GOT NOTHING FOR

YOU. I don't need you and your bredrin fuckin with me every fuckin day. Pointin, shoutin. I can't take no more of it to be honest with you" (*NW* 2013: 54). That differs significantly from anything Leah, Michel, Natalie or Frank say throughout the novel.

Felix

Initially, the second section, *Guest*, seems to be disconnected from the rest of the book as it gives a detailed account of Felix Cooper's day. We follow him as he says goodbye to his girlfriend in the morning, goes to see his father in the old estate, talks to his father's neighbour, travels to Central London to buy a used car for his girlfriend, goes to Soho to meet an ex-lover and in the end has an argument on the train back to Kilburn with two men who end up stabbing him. Felix, a thirty-two-year-old mechanic from Kilburn, was born "in the notorious Garvey House project in Holloway" (*NW* 2013: 92), "a mix of squat, halfway house and commune" (*NW* 2013: 105), but "the council rehoused the Coopers [to the Caldwell estate when] he was only eight years old" (*NW* 2013: 106). He was born into a family "without any means whatsoever" (*NW* 2013: 106). Leah and Natalie do not know Felix, but they grew up on the same estate. Felix is now living with his girlfriend, Grace, "not five hundred yards away" from Caldwell (*NW* 2013: 101).

Felix's father, Lloyd, still lives in dismal conditions in the old estate: the carpet in the flat is "a thick, synthetic purple pelt, unchanged in twenty years", the kitchen is "a mess of African masks and drums and the rest of that heritage whatnot", the dishes are "piled high in the sink and a small hill of bed linen had been stuffed in a corner, not yet taken to the launderette" (*NW* 2013: 103). A chunk of mould falls to Felix's shoulder as "the constant central heating, the cooking, the lack of ventilation, caused large mould flowers to bloom on the ceiling" (*NW* 2013: 104). As Sylvia, the woman Lloyd has been living with for the last three months, has left him, the place is in an even worse condition than it usually is.

When Felix is looking through a book of photographs of Garvey House, he sees on one of the photos "broken chairs and a mattress and a boy smoking a blunt" (*NW* 2013: 105). Those were the conditions he was born into, he grew up surrounded by lack of aspirations, lack of belief in the possibility to succeed, in conditions in which his father smoking a joint all day long was an everyday sight for him. Since lack of privilege is reproduced across generations the same way as privilege, it is very difficult for a child from such underprivileged conditions to move up the social ladder because of the lack of inculcated capital – not only do they lack economic means, they also lack cultural and social capital, two of the most important factors for social mobility.

Felix's parents were troubled, but they were interested in educating themselves. When Lloyd sees a photo of himself "flat out on a stained mattress reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*", he tells Felix: "See? You never believe me: always reading, I was always reading. That's where you kids get your brains. They called me "Professor". Everybody did" (*NW* 2013: 107). Also, Lloyd's neighbour, Phil Barnes, tells Felix:

> I used to have some good conversations with your mum way back when. Very good conversations, very interesting. She had a lot of interesting ideas, you know. Of course, I realize she was troubled, very troubled. But she had that thing most people don't have: curiosity. She might not have always got the right answers but she wanted to ask the questions. (*NW* 2013: 113)

Therefore, we can say that Felix grew up with very low amounts of economic capital, but he did get a certain cultural input from his parents. Growing up on an estate surrounded by other culturally underprivileged people can, however, hinder cultural progress for someone who would in principle be interested in educating themselves. As Phil notes, "it's very hard, Felix, you see, if you are interested in ideas and all that, ideas and philosophies of the past – it's very hard to find someone round here to really talk to, that's the tragedy of the thing, really, I mean, when you think about it" (*NW* 2013: 113). Phil himself even quotes from Keats, asking Felix, "But why should you know it! Who would have taught it to you?" (*NW* 2013: 115).

The value of embodied cultural capital gained by initial socialisation in the family lies in the input that creates interest in the individual to continue educating themselves. Being born into culturally underprivileged conditions can, consequently, result in lower educational achievements as those individuals lack the embodied cultural capital that could otherwise help them to succeed academically, which in turn leads to working-class people reproducing their social conditions across generations. This has also happened to Phil Barnes who says to Felix:

> I've got my verses, at least. But I had to learn them myself! In those days, you failed the eleven plus and that was it – on your bike. That's how it used to be. What education I've got I've had to get myself. I grew up angry about it. But that's how it used to be in England for our sort of people. It's the same thing now with a different name. You should be angry about it, too, Felix, you should! (*NW* 2013: 115)

Cultural capital can function as an instrument of domination in a society where educational achievements significantly affect an individual's life chances.

Before Felix started working as a mechanic, he used to do all sorts of odd jobs from catering to working as an assistant backstage at a theatre until he "got deep in the drug thing" (*NW* 2013: 126). He is a recovering addict, clean for "nine months, two weeks, three days" (*NW* 2013: 107), and he is trying to make a positive change in his life. Felix's life trajectory seems to suggest that the social capital one grows up with sets them an example they are likely to follow in the future as their environment has conditioned their habitus to see only certain choices as attainable; consequently, the lack of initiation leads to ignorance. Growing up in a family where the mother has walked out on her four children and the father is constantly stoned has resulted in Felix reproducing the pattern – "five and innocent at this bus stop. Fourteen and drunk. Twenty-six and stoned. Twenty-nine in utter oblivion, out of his mind on coke and K" (*NW* 2013: 117).

Smith's way of conveying the looks and remarks that reveal subtle class prejudices, the judgements of taste dividing individuals, is, for example, exemplified in the reaction a

girl on the train has to Felix. He sees a girl sitting in the other train, she is "frowning at his T-shirt" (*NW* 2013: 118) that says "*I Love Polish Girls*" in Polish (*NW* 2013: 127). He smiles at her, "a broad smile that emphasized his dimples and revealed three gold teeth. The girl's little dark face pulled tight like a net bag" (*NW* 2013: 118). The only reason why the girl would have such a reaction to a stranger sitting on the train is because she judges the person she sees negatively on the basis of his clothing, behaviour, appearance, etc. As Bourdieu (2010: 49) notes, tastes are first and foremost distastes. By making a negative judgement of Felix's taste, the girl is distancing herself from him, creating an invisible class boundary between them.

The fact that young working-class men are often referred to as youths is a linguistic judgement that also creates a class boundary. As Phil notes, "They always say "youth" don't they? /…/ Never the boys from the posh bit up by the park, they're just boys, but our lot are "youths", our working-class lads are youths, bloody terrible isn't it?" (*NW* 2013: 112). Judgements like that are essentially acts of symbolic violence aimed to create divisions between people occupying disparate social positions.

While the first section had numbered subchapters, the second section has London postcodes as its subchapters, each one signifying Felix's geographical location in the city as he travels from NW6 to W1 and back to NW6 again. The postal codes Smith uses as subheadings in the second section can be seen as signifiers of class since distribution in geographical space is never socially neutral (Bourdieu 2010: 96). When Felix is looking at a tube map in a train carriage he observes that the map does not express his reality, because for him the centre is Kilburn High Road and not Oxford Circus, while Pimlico is "pure science fiction" – "Who lived there? Who even passed through it?" he wonders (*NW* 2013: 163). After visiting his father, Felix travels to Central London to buy a used car from a twenty-five-year-old posh white boy called Tom Mercer as a present for his girlfriend.

Felix tells him that he used to do a bit of film work in the area and regrets it at once as Tom says: "I have a cousin who's a VP at Sony, I wonder if you ever came across him?" (*NW* 2013: 121). As Felix has to resort to saying, "Yeah, nah … I was just a runner, really. Here and there. Different places", Tom looks satisfied – "a small puzzle had been resolved" – and continues to tell him how he is in the media-related creative industries as film is "a very unstable business" (*NW* 2013: 121).

As a defence mechanism, Felix puts his hood up. One can tell that he is feeling very self-conscious around Tom, who is intentionally trying to show his social superiority, saying pompous things like "It's hard to explain – I work for a company that creates ideas for brand consolidation? So that brands can better target receptivity for their products – cutting-edge brand manipulation, basically" (*NW* 2013: 121). He could have just said that he works in advertising, but that would have robbed him of the chance to flaunt his vocabulary. Consequently, he is manipulating with his language, his cultural capital, to express his superiority. Felix stops and asks him astutely, "Like advertising?" and Tom replies irritably, "Basically, yes" (*NW* 2013: 121). The whole scene operates on the level of cultural, social and symbolic capital – as Tom is well-educated, socially well-connected and has more prestige resulting from his occupation, he uses those factors against Felix in order to establish his own higher social position. Another example of the difference in their cultural capital comes when Felix is looking under the hood of the car: "'Salvageable?' asked Tom. Felix looked perplexed. Tom tried again: 'Can it be saved?'" (*NW* 2013: 123). Schubert (2014: 179) has noted that language is a form of domination, and this is what Tom is using to establish his own position in opposition to that of Felix.

When Felix asks Tom whether he is married, the latter says, "Christ, no. We've only been going out nine months. I'm only twenty-five!" to which Felix replies, "I had two kids when I was your age /…/ Felix Jnr; he's a man now himself, almost fourteen. And

Whitney, she's nine" (*NW* 2013: 128), suggesting that he had his first child when he was only eighteen. Tom, who is insulated by his wealth and education, is reluctant to get married and have children so early in his life, which can be seen as a reflection on the general low fertility rates for the middle classes as their ultimate goal is the reproduction of social status through educational investments. That, however, requires one to be well-established with enough economic, cultural and social capital in order for the reproduction of social positions to be possible. For the middle classes, education is one of the strategies they use to advance their social position. Felix, who comes from a distinctly underprivileged working-class family, has already had two children by the age of twenty-five, even though he still has very low amounts of economic, cultural and social capital, which reflects the working-class tendency not to be concerned about educational investments and the reproduction of positions. Many of the other characters who have stayed in the working class have also reproduced this same pattern – for example, both of Felix's sisters and Natalie's sister, who all have very low amounts of economic capital, have had several children at an early age.

Felix describes his ex-wife, Jasmine, as follows: "Got a lot of mental issues. Grew up in care. My mum was in care – same thing. Does something to you. Does something. I know Jasmine since we was sixteen and she was like that from *time*. Depressed, don't leave the flat for days, don't clean, place is like a pigsty, all of that. She's had a hard time. Anyway" (*NW* 2013: 129). To this Tom only replies quietly, "Yes, that must be hard" (*NW* 2013: 129). Naturally, he has nothing else to say as his conditions are so far-removed from those of Felix's mother and his ex-wife – he cannot relate to that kind of a lifestyle as he knows nothing about such deprivation. Felix credits his girlfriend of six months with changing his life as she encourages him to educate himself. He says to Tom: "Listen, this girl changed my outlook totally. Globally. She sees my potential. And in the end, you just

got to be the best you that you can be. The rest will follow naturally" (*NW* 2013: 131). It sounds like a self-help mantra, but shows how important it is for one to have someone who believes in them and encourages them in order for them to be able to succeed. A child who grows up in an environment where nobody expects anything of them will never learn to aspire to anything. Therefore, being surrounded by people who consider success to be the norm instils that kind of an attitude in one's habitus and motivates them to achieve more.

Tom, however, whose mother thinks he is "suffering from some varietal of twenty-first-century intellectual ennui that made it impossible for him to take advantage of the good fortune he'd been born with" (*NW* 2013: 132) has had all the opportunities being born into a wealthy middle-class family can provide. He is rebelling against his parents' conventionality "because sometimes one wants to have the illusion that one is making one's own life, out of one's own resources", yet the difference between him and someone as underprivileged as Felix is that Tom can afford to think that "one shouldn't pretend that Brixton was any sort of place to live" (*NW* 2013: 132). He always has his parents' economic capital to fall back on: "But Tom, if you're feeling low, 20 Baresfield is empty until at least July. I don't know what you have against Mayfair" (*NW* 2013: 132). Middle-class individuals have their own existential struggles, but their struggles are usually not determined by economic necessity. Also, the higher amounts of cultural and social capital they take with them from home give them more opportunities to choose what they do with their lives. Thanks to his family's social capital, it is easier for Tom to find an internship: "Just go in there and present a few ideas, Tom, and show them what you're worth. At the very least Charlie will listen. We worked together for seven years, for Christ's sake!" (*NW* 2013: 132). Not everyone has a Charlie who will listen to them, though. Just as someone as underprivileged as Shar is not the sole author of their destitution, much the same way Tom is not the sole author of his privilege – the social positions they were born into have to a

great extent determined the options available to them as they have shaped their habituses and prepared them for their future lives.

After his meeting with Tom, Felix goes to Soho to finally break up with his ex-lover Annie Bedford. Annie is an impoverished aristocrat with a long and torturous family history (*NW* 2013: 139). Her dingy flat holds a "wooden chair that once graced the antechamber of Wentworth Castle" (*NW* 2013: 142). "Her great-uncle, the earl, owned the ground, beneath this building, beneath every building on the street, the theatre, the coffee houses, the McDonald's" (*NW* 2013: 144). Her mother and grandmother were presented at the palace (*NW* 2013: 148), but all that grandeur is gone for her now. When Felix reaches Annie's flat, he hears classical violins going at it (*NW* 2013: 138). Felix, however, listens to hip-hop and rap (*NW* 2013: 115), and he usually hears classical music only when the digital orchestra in his pocket plays "a piece of classical music from an aftershave advert from his childhood" (*NW* 2013: 135). His musical tastes have been shaped both by his social origin and his ethnic origin. As Felix is there to break up with Annie, he thinks to himself how he no longer has to pretend to be interested in ballet dancers and novels, things which have never interested him (*NW* 2013: 139). Annie quotes from Thomas Wyatt, "They flee from me that sometime did me seek" (*NW* 2013: 149), and even has a cat called Karenin (*NW* 2013: 138). The world of legitimate works of art is her world whereas it is not his world – he did not grow up surrounded by high culture. Even though Annie is impoverished and "there's no more money" (*NW* 2013: 138), she is still interested in the culture she grew up with as it forms an inseparable part of her habitus, proving the strength of inculcated dispositions which do not depend on economic capital. Annie's language is of course a reflection on her class background: "It didn't matter what nonsense came out of her mouth, her accent worked a spell" (*NW* 2013: 144). As Bourdieu (2010: 566) notes, pronunciation "unmistakably designates a stigmatized or prestigious origin".

Felix's concerns to change his life for the better are voiced when he tells Annie: "I'm tired of living the way I been living. I been feeling like I've been in the game, at this level, and I had a good time at this level – but, come on, Annie: even you would say it's a level with a lot of demons /…/ And I've killed them. And it was hard, and now they're dead and I've completed the level, and it's time to move to the next level" (*NW* 2013: 155). To this Annie replies: "Life's not a video game, Felix – there aren't a certain number of points that send you to the next level. There isn't actually any next level. The bad news is everybody dies at the end. Game over" (*NW* 2013: 155). Felix's struggle to get ahead, however, reflects the difficulty of changing one's habitus as it has been conditioned by past experiences over time – it is not possible to change one's experience of the world overnight. Annie once again highlights the difference between working- and middle-class fertility rates when she says to Felix: "I could be mouldering in some Hampshire pile at this very moment, covering and re-covering sofas with some baron in perfect sexless harmony. That's what my people do. While your lot have a lot of babies they can't afford or take care of. I'm sure it's all perfectly delightful, but you can count me the fuck out!" (*NW* 2013: 160). Because of her social position she is able to opt out of that kind of a lifestyle, she has the freedom to choose not to live the way "her people" usually do. "Not everyone wants this conventional little life you're rowing your boat towards" (*NW* 2013: 159), she says to Felix.

On the train back to Kilburn, a pregnant white woman makes a judgement about Felix and the other black man sitting opposite him on the basis of their skin colour and appearance when she says: "Sorry, could you ask your friend to move his feet?" (*NW* 2013: 165). She has made a judgement about the men, assuming that they are friends, purely on the basis of their appearance as they do not even know each other. Felix does not even know the man opposite, nodding "to a loud break-beat" (*NW* 2013: 163), or the friend

sitting next to him with "his head against the glass, oblivious and half hidden by his hood, nodding to his music" (*NW* 2013: 165), but asks one of them to remove his feet from the seat so that the lady could sit down. The man gets upset as he says, "Yeah? Why you asking me, though? Why you touching me? /…/ Why don't she ask me?" (*NW* 2013: 165). An argument follows and Felix thinks it best to leave as he vacates his own seat.

The two men also get off at Kilburn Station, Felix loses sight of them at first, but as he is walking home, they come back to mug him: "Money. Phone. Now" (*NW* 2013: 168). When Felix refuses to hand over his "treasured zirconias, a present from Grace" (*NW* 2013: 169), one of the men stabs him and he is left on the pavement, dying, with no one in sight willing to intervene. Fischer (2013: 26) has argued that Felix's killing is "a turn of events that highlights the point that both chance and social location conspire to produce life's outcomes. One is not, after all, the sole author of one's life". Fischer (2013: 26) further notes that "his desire to gain control of his life is not enough in a society where the odds of succeeding as a black, working-class man are curtailed by social inequities, as well as by destructive norms of masculinity". One of the things that Smith is emphasising with regard to social mobility is the difficulty faced by black people in trying to make a positive change in their social position – it is much harder for a black person to avoid reproducing their parents' underprivileged position, than it is for a white person. Consequently, race intersects with class here in the production of social positions.

Natalie

The third and longest section of the novel, *Host*, focuses mainly on Leah's best friend Natalie Blake or Keisha Blake as she was known when she was still at school. It provides a marked contrast to the previous section and Felix's story as Natalie's is the greatest success story in the novel. The section itself is divided into 185 miniature subsections, some of

them only a sentence long. Lorentzen (2012: para. 11) notes that "the mini-chapters allow Smith to pass quickly through time while getting the main events across". Natalie's entire life is compressed into these subchapters, from her childhood on the Caldwell estate to her social rise to become a barrister. As each of the sections is a reflection on the character's mindset, the disconnected subchapters of Natalie's section are a reflection on the disconnectedness she feels between her working-class childhood and her present upper middle class lifestyle.

Natalie grew up in a family where her mother, Marcia, was a health visitor and her father, Augustus, a plumber. Natalie and Leah's mothers had similar occupations and also similar outlooks: "Mrs Hanwell was a general nurse at the Royal Free Hospital and Mrs Blake a health visitor affiliated with St Mary's, Paddington. Neither woman was in any sense a member of the bourgeoisie but neither did they consider themselves solidly of the working class either" (*NW* 2013: 177). We can already see that both Leah and Natalie grew up in a very different family compared to Felix despite living on the same estate. Even though Leah and Natalie do not come from privileged backgrounds, they were both born into decent hard-working families. There is a different context for each family and that context will determine the kind of capital portfolio an individual will take with them from home. The conditions Natalie was born into enabled her to progress through the educational system and succeed the way she did.

Indeed, she could not help "the street on which she was born", but already as a child she was very determined, eager to get ahead: "Every unknown word sent her to a dictionary – in search of something like 'completion' – and every book led to another book, a process which of course could never be completed" (*NW* 2013: 178). Natalie can be seen getting her motivation also from looking at Leah's family. The contexts for their families are very different. For instance, Leah's father listens to Radio 4 in his spare time

which is something that is never done in Keisha's household: "The DJ on Colin Hanwell's kitchen radio could not always be between tracks. He could not always be between tracks at the very moment Keisha Blake walked into the Hanwell kitchen" (*NW* 2013: 179). A radio that does not play any music is initially "stranger than fiction" (*NW* 2013: 179) for her because of its unfamiliarity. "Keisha Blake was [also] eager to replicate some of the conditions she had seen at the Hanwells'. Cup, tea bag, then water, then – only then – milk. On a tea tray" (*NW* 2013: 175). As Keisha comes into contact with those conditions, they become a part of her habitus as she is able to familiarise herself with them – dispositions are inculcated in all social contexts and not just the one she experiences at home.

One of the reasons why Keisha is so determined is her mother's belief that "whatever you did in life you would have to do it twice as well as they did it 'just to break even'" (*NW* 2013: 182). Her mother expects her to succeed, which in turn conditions her habitus in a way that she sees educational success and social mobility as attainable. Keisha's highly religious mother kept her busy and taught her discipline, which is partly where she gets her determination from. While Leah spent her last summer before going off to university "under the shade of an oak tree on Hampstead Heath, with an assortment of friends, a picnic, a lot of alcohol, a little weed", "Keisha was working part-time in a bakery on the Kilburn High Road, and when she was not in the bakery she was in church, or helping Cheryl with the baby" (*NW* 2013: 199). The idea that familiarity with the field is important in order to see it as an attainable path is also put forward when the narrative voice remarks upon Keisha's boyfriend Rodney: "Where Rodney Banks had even got the idea of 'the law' it was difficult to say. His mother was a dinner lady. His father drove a bus" (*NW* 2013: 194). Rodney, "a miracle of self-invention" (*NW* 2013: 194), does indeed become a lawyer, which shows that social origin does not preclude certain paths but can make it harder to attain them. Keisha and Rodney were both able to go to university on "a

full council grant" (*NW* 2013: 194) thanks to their good results; otherwise, their lack of economic capital would probably have prevented them from attending. Even going to the university interviews was a problem because of the lack of economic means: the train to Manchester "cost one hundred and three pounds return. A similar – even more expensive – problem ruled out Edinburgh" (*NW* 2013: 195).

Keisha's family had low amounts of economic capital, which is why she was not able to buy the things she wanted when she was growing up. The shop glass that separates her from a pair of Nike Air trainers makes her feel "separated from happiness" (*NW* 2013: 181), and she secretly hides a bottle of Evian under a bag of carrots when she goes shopping with her mother. Keisha seems to be equating money, and the middle-class lifestyle that usually guarantees it, with happiness. At university, she takes out a large student loan and spends it on "frivolous things": "Meals and cabs and underwear" (*NW* 2013: 211). Natalie's desire to reinvent herself seems to be driven by the desire to attain more economic capital:

> Trying to keep up with 'these people', she soon found herself with nothing again, but now when she put a debit card in the slot and hoped that five pounds would come out, she did it without the bottomless anxiety she'd once shared with Rodney Banks. She cultivated a spirit of decadence. Now that she glimpsed the possibility of a future, an overdraft did not hold the same power of terror over her. The vision Marcia Blake had of such people, and had passed on to her daughter, came tumbling down in a riot of casual blaspheming, weed and cocaine, indolence. Were these really the people for whom the Blakes had always been on their best behaviour? On the tube, in a park, in a shop. (*NW* 2013: 211)

Franklin (2012: para. 16) argues that "Keisha dreams of achievement not only for its own sake, but for the visionary equality she hopes it will bring about". She sees herself as lower in social space because of her family's lack of economic means and is driven by the desire to gain more economic capital in order to feel equal to her social superiors.

Keisha and Rodney were both going to become lawyers, "the first people in either of their families to become professionals. They thought life was a problem that could be solved by means of professionalization" (*NW* 2013: 202). Along with setting herself on the

path of achieving a new social position, Keisha also changes her name to Natalie at university – a new name, a new identity. Through self-invention, she transforms herself into Natalie: "Congenital autodidact, always wanting to know /…/ She became Natalie Blake in that brief pause in their long history, between sixteen and eighteen. Educated herself on the floor of Kensal Rise Library while Leah smoked weed all the live-long day" (*NW* 2013: 71). Natalie has to become an autodidact if she wants to get ahead in order to make up for the low amount of cultural capital she grew up with. As children from culturally wealthy backgrounds inherit their wealth in the form of embodied dispositions, they have an advantage over someone like Natalie who has to teach herself instead. For instance, there is a reference to Keisha pronouncing the T and the S in the name Albert Camus for "not knowing any better: such are the perils of autodidacticism" (*NW* 2013: 193). As she wants to get ahead in life but lacks the embodied cultural capital that coming from a culturally wealthy background would endow her with, she has to become an autodidact. However, making things up as she goes along makes her feel like a forgery. As Franklin (2012: para. 16) argues, "the sense that she is a "forgery," that she is making up her life as she goes along, continues to nag at her". That sense will send her throughout the rest of the novel as she makes her progress to become a member of the upper middle class.

When Keisha first starts university at Bristol, she feels like she cannot fit in: "There seemed no point of entry. The students were tired of things Keisha had never heard of, and horrified by the only thing she knew well: the Bible" (*NW* 2013: 200). Because of her background, her habitus is not aligned with the habituses of the other students, resulting in a sense of alienation. The only other person at the university from Brayton Comprehensive, Michelle Holland, feels the same sense of alienation. Michelle grew up in the high-rise towers of south Kilburn, her father is in jail and her mother is sectioned. In a description of Michelle's life at university the narrative voice informs us:

> She was sensitive and sincere, awkward, defensive, lonely. It was Natalie's belief that she, Natalie Blake, didn't have to say a word to Michelle Holland to know all of this – that she could look at the way Michelle walked and know it. I am the sole author. Consequently Natalie was not at all surprised to hear of Michelle's decline and fall, halfway through the final year. No drink or drugs or bad behaviour. She just stopped. (This was Natalie's interpretation.) Stopped going to lectures, studying, eating. She had been asked to pass the entirety of herself through a hole that would accept only part. (Natalie's conclusion.) (*NW* 2013: 212)

The passage describes the struggle Michelle faces to change the course of her life, to not reproduce her parents' social position. However, Michelle is struggling to fit in at university because of her vastly different social background. It is another example of the improbability of people being the sole authors of their lives as the circumstances of their upbringing condition their experiences of the world and their habitus.

At university, Natalie falls in love with Francesco De Angelis, "an extraordinary young man" who "wore chinos with no socks, and those shoes that have ropes threaded along the sides, a blue blazer and a pink shirt. An indescribable accent. Like he was born on a yacht somewhere in the Caribbean and raised by Ralph Lauren" (*NW* 2013: 204). Already the first description of Frank sets him apart from Felix or any of the other young men previously mentioned walking along Kilburn High Road with their hoods on – he comes from the opposite side of the social spectrum and even his clothing – essentially his taste – is evidence of his difference. While Natalie feels lost during a seminar discussion, Frank gives the professor "a slow, approving nod, the kind a man gives to his equal" even though "his confidence seemed unwarranted, not following from anything he'd said or done" (*NW* 2013: 205). Frank feels at ease in the university environment, his privileged background has prepared him for attending a university ever since he was born, it is a natural step for him, whereas Natalie has had to work twice as hard to earn her place there and then struggles to truly feel she belongs. As Bourdieu (2010: 365) notes, "one can see how inherited dispositions predispose individuals to occupy the positions towards which they orient them". Social origin can determine the ambitions available to individuals.

Natalie hears the line "you *choose* your friends, you don't choose your family" (*NW* 2013: 213) countless times at university. She cannot change her social origin, but she is determined to get ahead by increasing the social capital that she has. Natalie gains more social capital by making new friends, friends who "know the difference between solicitors and barristers, and the best place to apply, and the likelihood of being accepted, and the names of the relevant scholarships and bursaries" (*NW* 2013: 213), things that her family members could never give her advice on because of the lack of familiarity with the field. As a result, the social network that she builds while at university helps her to get ahead, proving the importance of social capital. When Natalie is already studying for the bar and attends a sponsorship dinner at Lincoln's Inn, sitting next to all the other soon-to-be lawyers, she feels that she is "no longer an accidental guest at the table – as she had always understood herself to be – but a host, with other hosts, continuing a tradition" (*NW* 2013: 216). She has made the transition from being a working-class girl from a council estate to being an accepted member of the upper middle class, and the social capital she had access to once she started university has played an important part in her mobility.

Nevertheless, her low amount of economic capital has not made the transition easy. While Frank had been skiing for a year, "Natalie Blake had not been skiing. She'd been working in a shoe shop in Brent Cross shopping centre, saving money, living with her parents in Caldwell, and dreaming of winning the Mansfield scholarship" (*NW* 2013: 217). Since she does not get a scholarship, she has to take another loan. Money, or the lack it, is always a concern for Natalie. When she goes on dates with Frank, she establishes "a rule that romantic activities should be affordable for both parties" (*NW* 2013: 227). Frank and her mother eventually want to give Natalie the money so that she can finish her pupillage. The narrative voice sums up their relationship: "Low-status person with intellectual capital but no surplus wealth seeks high-status person of substantial surplus wealth for enjoyment

of mutual advantages" (*NW* 2013: 227). Smith's use of vocabulary characteristic of Bourdieu's theory here seems to suggest her own familiarity with his concepts and the way he approaches the reproduction of social divisions.

When Frank says to Natalie, "It doesn't make *sense* to let this kind of ability go to waste for the lack of means – it doesn't make *economic* sense. Your family for whatever reason refuse to help you", she gets upset, saying, "They don't refuse to help me, Frank – they can't!" (*NW* 2013: 228) and starts passionately defending them. Frank further adds, "Cheryl could stop having children. Your brother could get a job. They could leave that money-grabbing cult. Your family make poor life choices – that's just a fact" (*NW* 2013: 228). Having been born into privilege, it is of course easy for him to say that, but he never considers the possibility that maybe underprivileged people make poor life choices because they do not know any better as their experience of the world has never taught them to see life from the kind of perspective he does. Natalie and Frank have "opposite understandings of this word 'choice'. Both believed their own interpretation to be objectively considered and in no way the product of their contrasting upbringings" (*NW* 2013: 228). Natalie's husband, a banker with an already large amount of inherited economic capital, is a good example of how power and dominance is reproduced across generations. "He did not read or have any real cultural interests" (*NW* 2013: 250); therefore, he does not have very high amounts of cultural capital, except for his institutionalised cultural capital, but he has an economic power base supported both by his inherited wealth and his current occupation.

When Natalie first starts dating Frank, he takes her to his grandmother's flat in Marylebone; her first reaction is: "No one lives here" (*NW* 2013: 220). There is "white space in all directions" and the only thing in the fridge is "a large pink box from Fortnum & Mason" (*NW* 2013: 220). Natalie sees a copy of *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin on a shelf and as she asks Frank whether he has read the book, he replies: "I think he knew

my grandmother in Paris" (*NW* 2013: 220). Everything suggests that Frank was born into generations of inherited privilege. Natalie feels uncomfortable and says she "can't relax in a yard like this" (*NW* 2013: 220). She feels uncomfortable because she is not used to living in such conditions, her habitus and understanding of the world has been shaped by very different material conditions of existence. Bourdieu (2010: 166) maintains, "different conditions of existence produce different habitus" and Frank's living conditions are not natural to her habitus. Frank's inherited privilege is expressed also in the form of social capital. For instance, his mother, Elena, tells him: "'Cesco, please call your cousin. I said you would ring two weeks ago, and they can't hold a position forever. It's embarrassing" (*NW* 2013: 224). Being born into a privileged family grants him inherited social capital that gives him an advantage in life – if Frank wants a new job in banking, all he needs to do is speak to his cousin.

Natalie and Frank get married while she is still studying for the bar: "Quickie in Islington town hall. Honeymoon in Positano. Business class" (*NW* 2013: 231). The subchapter that describes their luxurious honeymoon symbolises Natalie's social ascension with regard to economic capital – as they are married now, Natalie shares Frank's economic status: "Can I put it straight on the room? The other guy said it was OK. 512" (*NW* 2013: 232). However, Natalie is determined to make her own way in life, so she negotiates a mortgage and splits the deposit in half. "All for a Kilburn flat that her husband could have bought outright without blinking" (*NW* 2013: 246). The more successful she becomes professionally, the more economic capital she gains herself as well. As Natalie and Frank both keep working all the time, they are "time poor" (*NW* 2013: 266) instead of being poor in the economic sense of the word. Smith also uses adjectival markers such as *posh* to indicate an individual's class belonging. For example, Leah describes Natalie to Shar: "She's got kids. Lives just over there, in the posh bit, on the park" (*NW* 2013: 10).

Smith also subtly conveys the judgements of taste dividing individuals. For instance, when Natalie takes her children to a playground, she witnesses a scene unfold between an elderly white lady and three young friends lounging on the roundabout. The lady takes issue with one of the boys smoking as she says, "You can't smoke in a playground. It's obvious. Any half-civilized person ought to know that" (*NW* 2013: 279). She further makes a judgement about them purely on the basis of their appearance as she adds, "They're all off that bloody estate" (*NW* 2013: 280). The boy does not listen to the old lady, so Natalie and two other people go over to the roundabout to ask the boy to put out the cigarette. What follows is an argument along the lines of class belonging as the boy tells them, "Listen, I don't do like you lot do around here. This ain't my manor. We don't do like you do here. In Queen's Park. You can't really chat to me, so" (*NW* 2013: 281). This in turn infuriates the Rasta woman who joined Natalie as she says:

> No you didn't. No no no. You having a laugh? *I'm Hackney*? So? SO? Listen, you can try and mess with these people but you can't mess with me, sunshine. I know you. In a deep way. I'm not Queen's Park, love, I'm HARLESDEN. Why would you talk about yourself in that way? Why would you talk about your area that way? Oh you just pissed me off, boy. I'm from Harlesden – certified youth worker. Twenty years. I am ashamed of you right now. You're the reason why we're where we are right now. Shame. Shame! (*NW* 2013: 281)

The argument proves Bourdieu's point that location in geographical space is never socially neutral. Each area signifies a certain social standing, and the characters classify each other, make a judgement about each other, on the basis of the areas they come from.

Initially, Natalie "told herself a story about legal ethics, strong moral character and indifference to money" (*NW* 2013: 242) and took up a job with a tiny legal aid firm in Harlesden where the "clients called at inappropriate times. They lied. They were usually late for court, rarely wore what they had been advised to wear and refused perfectly sensible plea deals. Occasionally they threatened her life" (*NW* 2013: 243). At first, Natalie returns to work in the streets where she had been raised, but that does not satisfy her, because the indifference to money that she proclaimed was only to avoid external

judgement, and she soon becomes a commercial barrister instead. She becomes a workaholic, because "she could only justify herself to herself when she worked" (*NW* 2013: 252). Natalie is in denial of her identity crisis and tries to cover it up by working even harder as she believes that hard work is all she needs to shed her old identity and transform her social self without ever looking back.

Bourdieu's belief that individual habituses become accustomed to their conditions of existence is exemplified in Natalie and Leah's reactions when they first go to Natalie's new home: "Natalie was ashamed to find herself momentarily disappointed: after camping in Frank's place all these months, this looked small. Leah did a circuit of the lounge and whistled. She was working from an older scale of measurement: twice the size of a Caldwell double" (*NW* 2013: 246). Even though they come from the same council estate background, their dispositions differ because of diverging life trajectories. For Natalie, the money that she is working so hard to earn is "for the distance the house put between you and Caldwell" (*NW* 2013: 252). Consequently, she is trying to transform her social identity through economic capital. Natalie's social ascension is complete when she realises that she had "completely forgotten what it was like to be poor. It was a language she'd stopped being able to speak, or even to understand" (*NW* 2013: 276). Consequently, Natalie has become accustomed to the lifestyle that her economic capital has made possible for her.

When Natalie goes to see her sister Cheryl, who still lives with their mother in the old estate and has three children of her own now, she says to her, "I just can't stand to see you all living like this" (*NW* 2013: 259). Cheryl gets upset, replying, "If you hate Caldie so much, why d'you even come here? Seriously, man. No one asked you to come. Go back to your new manor" (*NW* 2013: 259). Natalie wants them to live somewhere nice, but Cheryl says, "This is a nice place! There's a lot worse. You done all right out of it" (*NW* 2013: 260). For Natalie, a middle-class lifestyle is the ultimate form of human happiness,

something everyone should aspire to, so she cannot see how anyone can be happy living on an estate with their mother and three children. "Why am I being punished for making something of my life? /…/ I work hard. I came in with no reputation, nothing. I've built up a serious practice" (*NW* 2013: 261) she says. Despite her low amount of initial symbolic capital, she has moved up the social ladder and thinks everyone else should follow in stride, but her family's understanding of happiness differs from hers. Natalie has achieved symbolic capital, recognition and prestige, in the social world, but she wants her family to be proud of her achievements. As Natalie complains to Leah about her mother, "People actually think I'm early QC material. Doesn't mean anything to her" (*NW* 2013: 268).

As the novel progresses, we see that Natalie is intensely miserable. Despite achieving exactly the kind of life she had dreamt of with the perfect husband, the perfect house and the perfect job, she feels alienated from herself and dissatisfied with her life. Natalie's identity crisis can be explained through the sense of disconnection she feels between her old life and her new life, and the fact that this perfect life she had dreamt of has not turned out to be that perfect after all. Smith (*Start the Week* 2013) has mentioned that people generally assume that "rising to a middle-class life is the aim of everybody and the final example of human happiness, but of course when you meet middle-class people and so many of them are intensely miserable for various reasons, you start to wonder about that idea". This is exactly what has happened to Natalie – she has worked hard all her life to rise to a middle-class position and now that she has achieved that lifestyle, it turns out to be something other than she expected. Smith (*Start the Week* 2013) also adds that one of the things Natalie is miserable about is the supposed gift of isolation that comes with middle class and upper middle class life, referring to the idea that the higher you go, the less contact you have with other people; Natalie, however, misses the communality of estate life. The community that those places provide makes them valuable.

Gradually the cracks begin to show in Natalie and Frank's marriage as their outward show of happiness is only a spectacle put on for their friends. Franklin (2012: para. 16) notes, "as her life moves further and further up the ladder of class and wealth—well-compensated career, lavish apartment, children, nanny—she starts to lurk, and then not only to lurk, on the sort of "casual encounter" website where people advertise in search of trysts, in what can only be an attempt to sabotage her gains". It seems as if Natalie is haunted by her own success as she feels guilty about moving up the social ladder while leaving her family members behind. Deep down she knows her childhood has shaped her into who she is, but she is nevertheless trying to repress that knowledge, and in the process of denying her identity she ends up sabotaging her marriage. Also, when she has those trysts she wears clothes that she normally would never wear: "gold hoops, denim skirt, suede boots with tassels, the hair bobble with the black and white dice, and her work clothes in a rucksack on her back" (*NW* 2013: 288), suggesting that a certain taste in clothes is required for such things, a taste usually identified with people with a low social position. Also, she identifies herself online as Keisha and not Natalie. Lorentzen (2012: para. 13) has suggested that she is "trying to recover a lost, more feral self" by doing that.

When Natalie's husband finds the emails she has been sending, they have a fight, and Natalie walks out the door in her slippers. As she heads towards Kilburn High Road, she sees police cars blocking the way on Albert Road. This is where Natalie and Felix's stories briefly intersect as Felix's killing is the "incident" on the road. The officer looks down at Natalie as she asks the policeman, "Can I walk down there?" (*NW* 2013: 299). She is wearing "a big T-shirt, leggings and a pair of filthy red slippers, like a junkie" (*NW* 2013: 299). The officer is making a judgement of taste about her based on what she is wearing. He is judging her to be "no one" (*NW* 2013: 300) because of the way she is dressed.

Therefore, Smith can be seen referring to judgements of taste as markers of class belonging that create divisions between individuals.

Natalie has indeed managed to move up the social ladder, leaving the Caldwell estate behind, but at the cost of her sense of self. Susan Alice Fischer (2013: 26) notes that "the flashback provides an understanding of what moving into the middle class has cost Keisha/Natalie: vignettes show her repressing unsettling feelings about her connection to herself, her family, and the world around her". She has lost her sense of self and is searching for the meaning in her life she has lost in the process of her social progress. We learn that already as a child "parental legacy meant little to Keisha Blake; it was her solid sense that she was in no way the creation of her parents and as a result could not seriously believe that anybody else was the creation of theirs" (*NW* 2013: 181). Natalie believes she is the sole author of the dictionary that defines her. "Her glass was never half empty or half filled but always filling" (*NW* 2013: 277). Also, she does not like it when Leah calls her Keisha now, because "she dislikes being reminded of her own inconsistencies" (*NW* 2013: 63). Natalie thinks that she can cast her social origin aside completely as she moves up the social ladder, but the transition cannot be complete since her background forms an essential part of her, having shaped her habitus.

Nathan

Nathan Bogle is the one character in the novel we learn the least about and the things we do learn about him come mainly in the form of dialogue. Smith (Neary 2012: para. 10) has noted that she wanted Nathan to speak with his own voice so that he could exist outside of commentary or control that is so often applied to young black men. Lynn Neary (2012: para. 11) also points out that "Smith never mentions that Nathan is black. In fact, she never describes the race of any of her characters — unless the person is white" as she wanted to

turn the idea of race in its head. We briefly meet Nathan already in the first section when Leah and her mother, Pauline, are about to buy a travel card from him at Kilburn Station. Leah and Natalie both knew Nathan while they were growing up as they lived on the same estate, but neither Leah nor Pauline recognises him at first until he addresses Pauline as "Mrs Hanwell" (*NW* 2013: 45). When Leah observes Nathan, she notes, "The clothes are ragged. One big toe thrusts through the crumby rubber of an ancient red-stripe Nike Air. The face is far older than it should be" (*NW* 2013: 45). She is already classifying him on the basis of his appearance, positioning him in social space with regard to how he is dressed. When they recognise him and Pauline asks him how he is doing, he replies: "Surviving" (*NW* 2013: 45).

It becomes immediately clear that Nathan is struggling in life, having fallen back on the social ladder, at school "the very definition of desire for girls who had previously only felt that way about certain fragrant erasers" (*NW* 2013: 46) but now a social pariah to be avoided on the streets: "About once a year she sees him on the high road. She ducks into a shop, or crosses, or gets on a bus. Now missing a tooth here and there and there. Devastated eyes. What should be white is yellow. Red veins breaking out all over" (*NW* 2013: 46). As they buy the travel card from Nathan and say their goodbyes, they leave in haste, Pauline noting: "His poor mother! I should stop in on her one of these days. So sad. I'd heard, but I hadn't seen it with my own eyes" (*NW* 2013: 46). As with Shar, once again Leah and Pauline are no longer able to relate to Nathan's condition since their own economic position blinds them to the material conditions of existence experienced by the truly deprived – they do not put themselves in Nathan's place as he occupies a position on the other side of the social world. As Smith notes: "So sad is too distant from Pauline's existence" (*NW* 2013: 46).

Natalie first briefly meets Nathan after all these years while "he sat on the bandstand in the park, smoking, with two girls and a boy. Two women and a man. But they were dressed as kids. Natalie Blake was dressed as a successful lawyer in her early thirties" (*NW* 2013: 263). Smith uses a reference to their different tastes in clothing as a marker of their different socioeconomic positions. Next time we meet Nathan is when Natalie is aimlessly walking the streets after she has had a fight with Frank and finally decides to climb the boundary wall in Caldwell. Nathan sees her, noting, "You trying to break back in?" (*NW* 2013: 300). Nathan confesses to Natalie: "Should have gone from here time ago. Sometimes I don't get myself. Who's chaining me? No one. Should have gone Dalston. Too late now" (*NW* 2013: 303). He has regrets about his choices, about staying in Caldwell and not trying to make anything of his life.

As Natalie and Nathan look around Caldwell, they notice three children, looking bored. "Their boredom was familiar to her, she remembered it. The girl kicked a dented can over and over. One of the boys had a long branch he held loosely in his hand, letting it collide with whatever got in its way" (*NW* 2013: 303). The main reason why the working-class children growing up on a council estate often stay in the same social position as an adult is the lack of embodied cultural capital inherited from the family. While their parents let them hang around the estate, looking bored, middle-class parents invest in their children's educational progress already at early age by keeping them busy with extracurricular activities among other things. Without such an input the child grows up with a lower amount of cultural capital which will result in lower educational achievements and consequently poor prospects in the job market. That is how the underprivileged working class positions become reproduced across generations, which is what has happened to Nathan as well. As Smith (Wachtel 2010: para. 108) has claimed, "class matters when it foreshortens what you can possibly do in your life".

Nathan was very popular at school and seemed to have a promising future ahead of him. As Natalie tells him, "You were good with everything. That's how I remember it" (*NW* 2013: 304). He used to play football but had to quit because of bad tendons:

> Bad tendons. I played on. No one told me. Lot of things would be different, Keisha. Lot of things. That's how it is. That's it. I don't like to think about them days, to be truthful. At the end of the day I'm just out here on the street, grinding. Bustin' a gut, day in day out. Tryna get paid. I done some bad things, Keisha, I'm not gonna lie. But you know that ain't really me. You know me from back in the day. (*NW* 2013: 305)

Nathan tells Natalie, "I'm on the street, Keisha. I had some bad luck" (*NW* 2013: 306). Natalie feels embarrassed by his bad luck because of her own social success. Nathan is doing drugs and living on the streets now while Natalie has become a successful barrister. "How'd you get into that?" (*NW* 2013: 307), Nathan asks her. The circumstances of their life have led them to such diverging paths. Nathan feels trapped in his conditions, he got into bad company, friends that influenced him in a negative way, and he became used to living like that, his habitus became shaped by those conditions and now he does not know how to get out, how to make that change:

> That little chief. Don't know why I ever give him my time. This is on him. Always taking shit too far. How can I stop Tyler though? Tyler should stop Tyler. I shouldn't even be chatting with you, I should be in Dalston, cos this isn't even on me, it's on him. But I'm looking at myself asking myself: Nathan, why you still here? Why you still here? And I don't even know why. I ain't even joking. I should just run from myself. (*NW* 2013: 308)

The circumstances of his life cannot solely be blamed on him, on his bad choices, because coming from an underprivileged background he just might not know any better. The lack of capital – not only economic but also cultural and social capital – can result in "poor life choices" (*NW* 2013: 228) as Frank called them.

Nathan's low social position, which is already expressed in his appearance, makes people he once knew act as if they do not know him. As he says to Natalie: "Some people act like they don't know you" (*NW* 2013: 304). "People don't chat to me no more. Look at me like they don't know me. People I used to know, people I used to run with" (*NW* 2013:

308), he tells her. Natalie's own mother crosses the street when she sees him: "Once I got fourteen she's crossing the street acting like she ain't even seen me. That's how it is in my eyes. There's no way to live in this country when you're grown. Not at all. They don't want you, your own people don't want you, no one wants you" (*NW* 2013: 313). Mark Medley (2012: para. 10) has suggested that "almost every character [in the novel] feels alienated in one way or another: Leah from Natalie; Natalie from her family, who still live in a council estate; Felix from his mother; Nathan from the whole of society".

Nathan has become disillusioned about people and society in general because of the way he has been treated after falling further down the social ladder. "What do you know about my life? When you been walking in my shoes? What do you know about living the way I live, coming up the way I came up? Sit on your bench judging me" (*NW* 2013: 313), he says to Natalie. Nathan referring to "coming up the way I came up" suggests circumstances worse than those in which Natalie grew up in, but we never really learn anything else about Nathan's family except for the fact that his mother no longer lets him in the house. Despite growing up on the same estate and going to the same school, Natalie and Nathan have had very different trajectories which can be explained by the differing experiences growing up in families with differing capital portfolios can lead to. In addition, their habituses have been shaped by very different circumstances since leaving Brayton. Nathan tells Natalie, "You ain't got shit to cry about" (*NW* 2013: 314), suggesting that Natalie has no real problems because she does not have to struggle economically. However, Bourdieu's (2010: 376) observation that "no one ever really puts himself 'in the place' of those on the other side of the social world" works both ways – the wealthy do not see life from the perspective of the poor and *vice versa*. Natalie and Nathan have both become accustomed to their own conditions of existence and do not even know how to see life from the other's perspective.

At the very end of the novel, Leah and Natalie notify the police that they believe Nathan might have been the one who stabbed the man on Albert Road. Natalie and Leah have made a judgement of character about Nathan based on his social standing and lifestyle. "At the very least, /…/ Nathan Bogle is a person of interest. From what you've said. Added to what we already knew. About his character. At the very least he's a person of interest" (*NW* 2013: 332), Leah says. She is quick to judge Nathan despite her guilt about social mobility. Smith (2013: para. 4) has noted that "the happy ending is never universal. Someone is always left behind. And in the London I grew up in – as it is today – that someone is more often than not a young black man". More often than not that young black man also has a working-class background. The judgement they make about Nathan is essentially an example of the divisiveness of social markers such as taste.

When Michel asks Natalie to come over and talk to Leah at the end of the novel, Leah finally tells Natalie, "I just don't understand why I have this life /…/ You, me, all of us. Why that girl and not us. Why that poor bastard on Albert Road. It doesn't make sense to me" (*NW* 2013: 331). Natalie's answer to that is:

> Because we worked harder /…/ We were smarter and we knew we didn't want to end up begging on other people's doorsteps. We wanted to get out. People like Bogle – they didn't want it enough. I'm sorry if you find that answer ugly, Lee, but it's the truth. This is one of the things you learn in a courtroom: people generally get what they deserve. (*NW* 2013: 332)

Leah is haunted by liberal guilt, wondering why she has managed to attain a comfortable lifestyle while others like Shar are still underprivileged. Natalie, however, has no such qualms – for her, those who work hard achieve more. Neary (2012: para. 13) has noted that "Smith leaves the reader with this question: How is it that four people can begin their lives in roughly the same set of circumstances and yet end up in such different places? It's a question Smith says she has no intention to answer". Smith (*Start the Week* 2013) has claimed that she conceived the ending of the book as a thing from which the author steps

back so that the reader can have her own interpretation depending on her own feeling of how social mobility works.

The question of whether Leah and Natalie really have a better life compared to the others just because they "worked harder" – do people really get what they deserve – is the ethical puzzle the readers are meant to solve. Smith (2013: para. 4) notes that Shakespeare's famous line from *Measure for Measure* "Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall" is "embedded deep in *NW*". People do not always get what they deserve in life as the circumstances of their birth can set them on a course that makes it hard to succeed regardless of how much they try to make a positive change in their life. Fischer claims:

> That Natalie's story is bookended by those of Felix and Nathan underscores Smith's theme that poverty is not "a personality trait." Things are not "meant to be" just because they happen in this best—or worst—of all possible worlds, and no one is the sole author of her life. Discounting the role of both chance and environment, Natalie insists that she and Leah have the lives they do because they "worked harder," and that "people generally get what they deserve." The novel's final, sinister "visitation" undercuts her claim. (Fischer 2013: 26)

Natalie did well in life not just because she worked harder but because she got lucky, she was born into the kind of conditions that enabled her to make that leap.

When Nathan tells Natalie, "Bad luck follows me, Keisha" (*NW* 2013: 312), she says she does not believe in luck. To this, Nathan replies, "You should. It rules the world" (*NW* 2013: 312). This exchange encompasses the idea, presented already in the first paragraph of the novel, of whether individuals really are the sole authors of their lives. Natalie believes that they are, and her social progress seemingly supports her belief, whereas Nathan believes luck to play a vital role in one's life. Literary fiction as all the other forms of legitimate art is primarily written by and for the well-educated middle classes, and while Smith herself has certainly become a member of the well-educated middle class, she has nevertheless produced a work of fiction that is trying to reconcile the disparate worlds inhabited by the different classes. The epigraph to the novel – "When Adam delved and Eve span, / Who was then the gentleman?" – comes from John Ball's sermon on equality

from the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and refers already in the begging to the novel's implicit concerns with social equality. As Fischer (2013: 25) notes, "it alludes, as do the various references to apple trees and apple blossoms strewn throughout the novel, to the destructive distance contemporary society, with its staggering inequalities, has travelled from an Edenic, egalitarian past".

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Smith's novel shows that many of the theoretical concepts proposed by Bourdieu for the better understanding of how social divisions are created and maintained in society can rather successfully be applied to literary analysis as they help to elucidate the divergent social trajectories of the characters. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework enabled to achieve a clearer understanding of how class boundaries are created in the fictional context and why some characters remain underprivileged while others thrive. Bourdieu's insistence on the relational nature of the different types of capital is also exemplified in the social reality of the characters as their chances depend not only on economic resources but also on cultural and social resources.

There is no single reality for society as a whole, only specific ways of seeing it and the way we see it depends on our location in social space. Bourdieu's theory helps to understand the relative nature of reality and explain the characters' diverging life trajectories as the creation of individual social positions depends not only on economic resources but also on cultural and social resources. Differences are created between individuals by their different capital portfolios. Bourdieu's theory also helps to understand why class is still a relevant concept in British society where social inequalities persist. Bourdieu explains the persistence of inequalities though the prism of inherited privilege – not only economic but also cultural and social inherited privilege result in closure of ranks and enduring social divisions, which is one of the main reasons why working-class people struggle when they attempt to achieve greater social mobility. Therefore, class matters because it precludes us from being the sole authors of our lives as privilege is reproduced across generations.

The line "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me" (*NW* 2013: 3) guides the entire narrative in Smith's novel as an implicit reference to the divisive nature of the persistent social inequalities characteristic of British society. The characters' differing life trajectories pose the question of whether individuals really are the sole authors of their lives or whether their lives are in one way or another determined by the socioeconomic circumstances they are born into. Smith does not provide any answers to that question in the course of the narrative but leaves the ends open for the reader to decide on basis of their own understanding of social mobility.

The notion of the possibility of individual authorship of one's life frames the entire work as the novel begins with Leah first hearing the line on the radio and ends with Leah and Natalie discussing the reasons for their current social positions. Natalie believes that everything she has achieved in life is the result of her own hard work and those who stay in an underprivileged position are to be blamed for their own misfortune, because they simply have not worked hard enough. Natalie believes that "people generally get what they deserve" and she and Leah have progressed because they "worked harder" (*NW* 2013: 332). The characters' lives in the novel, however, suggest otherwise. Indeed, Natalie was able to achieve social mobility and she did work hard, proving that social mobility is possible, but she also grew up in the kind of conditions that enabled her to make that leap.

However, Felix, an extremely nice person and a very likeable character, tries very hard to make a positive change in his life but nevertheless struggles to do so as he has been disadvantaged already at birth. Even though Natalie and Felix both grew up on the same estate, initially suggesting that they had the same conditions of existence as children, they had very different family contexts, which resulted in their habituses being shaped in different ways. Therefore, their life trajectories prove that individuals can grow up with roughly the same economic resources but have different prospects because of differing

amounts of embodied cultural capital. In line with Bourdieu's theoretical framework, we can conclude that indeed individuals can exercise agency to change the course of their lives, but their chances are initially determined by their social origin as location in social space shapes their experiences and habitus.

The author of this thesis would conclude that the characters are not the sole authors of their lives as their social origin, their location in social space and capital portfolios seem to have a significant impact upon their chances in life. The characters' differing life trajectories can be explained through Bourdieu's belief that since individuals are born into a stratified society, into a family that is either privileged or underprivileged, the circumstances of their social origin either give them an advantage or a disadvantage. The characters can work hard and improve their social position, but social mobility is more about making the most of the capital portfolio one has been endowed with than simply being the sole author of one's life. Therefore, the circumstances of one's birth can significantly affect their chances in life, and those circumstances really come down to luck, whether one is lucky enough to be born into a culturally wealthy family or not – luck "rules the world" (*NW* 2013: 312) as Nathan says. We could argue that cultural capital can be seen as more important in determining life chances than economic capital; although, they all work together in the (re)production of social positions.

In the novel, economic privilege intersects with cultural and social privilege, for instance, in the creation of Natalie and Frank's lifestyle, and for the lack of access to the same high amounts of all of those types of capital, Michel and Leah cannot reproduce their lifestyle. Low amounts of embodied cultural capital also result in the characters feeling uncomfortable in the university environment. Both Leah and Natalie feel as if they do not belong while studying at university, a phenomenon Bourdieu explains through the lower levels of cultural capital possessed by working-class children entering university – as their

habituses have been conditioned in different circumstances, they do not feel the university environment to be natural for them. Consequently, characters from different social positions experience the world differently.

The difficulty the characters have with identifying with the lives of those individuals who belong to a socioeconomic class different from their own is also supported by Bourdieu's notion that an individual's economic position is likely to blind them to the material conditions of existence experienced by other members of society. Not only do the wealthy have difficulty with identifying with the conditions of the poor, but the poor also struggle to understand the conditions in which the economically better off live. While Natalie has forgot what it feels like to be poor by the end of the novel as she has become so accustomed to her current conditions of existence, Felix finds it difficult to understand how anyone can even live in a place like Pimlico, suggesting that economic circumstances lead to social alienation between different groups of individuals.

Smith often uses implicit markers of class belonging to indicate the differing social positions of the characters and relying on Bourdieu's theoretical framework can help to decipher the hidden meaning behind such implicit references. For instance, a casual remark about the quality of education offered at a certain school reveals Leah's neighbours as middle-class parents without the author explicitly mentioning their class background since the middle classes put greater emphasis on their children's education as a strategy to maintain and advance their social position. Smith also uses adjectival markers such as *posh* to indicate a character's class belonging. She also uses references to location in geographical space as markers of class. As each area signifies a certain social standing, the characters classify each other on the basis of the areas where they live.

The characters occupying different positions in social space also dress, behave and speak differently, an example of their habituses having been shaped by their location in

social space. For instance, language as a form of cultural capital is expressed throughout the novel as a marker of class distinctions as the characters occupying differing positions also speak very differently. The working-class characters often use slang words, swear words and grammatically incorrect sentences, while the middle and upper middle class characters are set apart by their grammatically correct speech and extensive vocabulary, a reference to their higher levels of legitimate cultural capital. Smith also uses taste markers such as references to the types of clothing the characters wear and the kind of food they serve their guests as signifiers of their social difference. Such implicit markers can effectively convey social differences without the author having to resort to explicitly stating a character's class background.

Smith also conveys class distinctions through the characters' judgements of other characters. Bourdieu's assertion that judgements of taste depend on one's social position and function as acts of social positioning is, for example, exemplified in Leah's judgement of a boy wearing a cap, a hooded top and low jeans. For her, such clothes are worn only by members of a certain social group, a group she only sees negatively and does not identify with. Significantly, it is a group lower in social space compared to her, and her aversion to their tastes is an example of how class barriers are created in society through judgements of taste.

We can, therefore, deduce that class has been dealt with implicitly in the novel as references to class divisions can be found throughout the book without the author explicitly stating that any of the markers signify class belonging. All in all, it can be concluded that unlike the majority of literary works produced in Britain Smith's novel does not have a middle-class focus as the novel centres on individuals occupying very different points on the social spectrum despite living in such close quarters, showing how much individual lives can differ even within a single small area. In the fictional context of the novel, class

can be seen as an implicit but pernicious phenomenon that can greatly affect the characters' life chances, depriving them of the opportunity to become the sole authors of the dictionaries that define them.

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RESÜMEE

Tartu Ülikool
Anglistika osakond

Sirli Manitski

Klassiküsimus Zadie Smith'i romaanis „NW"

Magistritöö
2016
104 lk

Magistritöö käsitleb sotsiaalse klassi problemaatikat kaasaegses briti kirjanduses Zadie Smith'i romaani „NW" (2012) näitel, püüdes välja selgitada, kui oluline on ühiskonnaklassi teema romaani fiktsionaalses kontekstis ning kuidas tegelaste klassierinevusi esile tuuakse.

Töö sissejuhatuses antakse ülevaade sotsiaalse klassi mõistest laiemalt, keskendutakse seejärel klassi kui nähtuse tähtsusele briti ühiskonnas ning selle kujutamisele briti kirjanduses. Esimeses peatükis tutvustatakse teoreetilise raamistikuna Pierre Bourdieu' keskseid mõisteid *majanduslik, sotsiaalne, kultuuriline* ja *sümboolne kapital*, *haabitus, väli* ja *maitse*. Bourdieu' esitletud mõisted sõltuvad üksteisest ega eksisteeri eraldi, mistõttu toimivad eri kapitali vormid, haabitus ja väli ühiselt inimese sotsiaalse staatuse kujundamisel. Teises peatükis vaadeldakse romaani peategelaste sotsiaalset reaalsust ja seda, kuidas nende klassikuuluvus ilmneb ja kuidas nende elukäiku mõjutab.

Analüüsist nähtub, et kuigi autor ei viita otsesõnu klassile kui olulisele tegurile teose tegelaste sotsiaalse reaalsuse kujunemisel, mõjutab klassikuuluvus implitsiitselt tegelaste

ühiskondlikke väljavaateid. Bourdieu' teoreetiline raamistik põhjendab erinevusi sarnase sotsiaalse taustaga tegelaste elutrajektoorides. Smith kujutab väga erineva sotsiaalse tausta ja trajektooriga tegelasi ning näitab, et tegelaste sünnijärgne klassikuuluvus võib oluliselt mõjutada nende tulevikuväljavaateid ja võtta neilt võimaluse saada oma elu ainuautoriteks.

Märksõnad:

Pierre Bourdieu, sotsiaalne klass, Zadie Smith, briti nüüdiskirjandus

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

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   mille juhendaja on Ene-Reet Soovik

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